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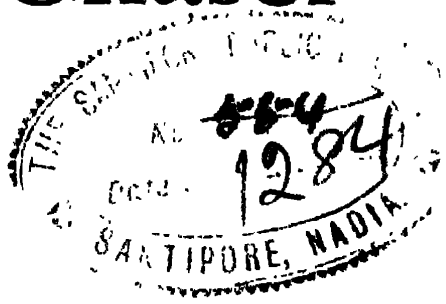

By

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SAKTIPORE, NADIA

CHARGER AND CHASER

CHAPTER I

IN THE KAFFIR KRAAL

"MOUNT!"

The word of command was given by Captain Beckman, of Beckman's Natal Horse, and half a dozen men sprang into the saddles.

They were stirring times in Zululand in those days, and Cetewayo was causing endless trouble to his white neighbours. Beckman's Horse had a big reputation, earned by hard work, bravery, and skill. "A regular set of dare-devils," the Commander-in-Chief called them, and the name was well deserved. Hazardous enterprises were much to their liking—they loved danger, and the paths wherein men fear to tread; the very men to lead a "forlorn hope," or to charge Zulus against tremendous odds. How they hated the "black fiends" who had killed and "treated" many of their number. They showed no mercy when it came to a hand-to-hand conflict; they knew what would befall them if they suffered defeat, and the thing they dreaded was the outrages committed on bodies after death.

The Zulus feared them, brave and undaunted though they were. Strong, tall, well-built, athletic men, these dark-skinned warriors, fanatical, having no terror of death; yet they quailed and fled before the terrific rush of Beckman's Horse.

To ambush a small party of the Natal Horse and annihilate them caused much savage joy in the Zulu camps. Many a time a hundred savages had hemmed in a dozen of Beckman's Horse, and they had cut their way through the dusky hordes and escaped, yelling defiance at their foes, as a shower of assegais rained round them. The bulk of the men carried the marks of jagged wounds on their bodies, and as they looked at them fingered their carbines and breathed vengeance.

Beckman's men never questioned their leader; he gave orders, they obeyed, and followed him wherever he cared to lead. Their captain was fearless, reckless, and they loved him; many a trooper had risked his life to save his leader, and wished for no thanks.

When the men were seated in their saddles Captain Beckman led the way. For some time there was silence, then Beckman said to the man nearest, "I suppose we can trust this fellow. He's done us good service, and his life would be forfeited if he fell into the hands of the Zulus. They know him; he's a marked man."

"He is to be trusted, I think, so far as any of them are to be trusted," replied Grant Halstead, a lieutenant in the Natal Horse, and a friend and comrade of Beckman's.

The Zulu guide had given Captain Beckman information which he determined to verify. The native reported that a body of some hundreds of Zulus had been seen in the direction of the Imbanani River, a day or two ago, and Hal Beckman meant testing the accuracy of his information. "If he plays us false, he'll be the first to die," said Beckman.

For a long time they rode on, following the Zulu. It was a wild country, hilly, many dongas; sundry kraals were passed, and divers places suitable for ambuscades.

Hal Beckman kept a sharp look out on all sides, for there was no telling where their agile, cunning enemies might hide.

They were over a dozen miles from their camp when he called a halt, ordered the men to off-saddle, and after knee-haltering the horses they were turned into the grass

"We'll have coffee here," he said; "it looks a likely place for Zulus, but there are none about."

Grant Halstead did not like the look of the spot, but remained silent: it was not his business to give his opinion unasked, and Beckman was the more experienced man.

The place chosen was a Kaffir kraal, containing about half a dozen vacant huts, and surrounded on three sides by a stone wall. At the back was the Imbanani River, some distance away, flowing at the foot of a steep hill. Between the river and the kraal Tambookie grass reared to a height of six feet; Kaffir corn and mealies grew on each side, and the only clear space was in front, by the way they entered.

"It's an ideal spot for an ambush," thought Grant Halstead, wondering why his comrade had selected it as their halting-place. Hal Beckman, however, was always taking risks; his men were used to them.

The horses could not stray far away as they cropped the grass which abounded close at hand.

While coffee was being prepared, Hal Beckman and Grant strolled about among the huts. It was evident, from numerous signs, they had been occupied recently.

"Frightened out by hostile Zulus," said Hal; "that's about it. I wonder if there's any 'game' near."

"More than we anticipate, probably," said Grant, now he had a chance to speak.

Captain Beckman turned quickly towards him as he said—

"What do you mean?"

"This is about as likely a place for Zulus on the watch as I have seen. A hundred of the beggars could hide in that tall Tambookie grass and we should be none the wiser; there's cover for them all round."

"Grant, you're becoming nervous," said Hal, laughing. "That last narrow squeak upset you."

Grant Halstead looked grave.

"It was too narrow to be pleasant," he replied. "I'm not nervous, but I can't see the wisdom of running unnecessary risks."

"Which I suppose I do," said Beckman good-humouredly.

"Yes, I fancy you are doing so now. I seem to scent Zulus, the atmosphere is full of 'em," replied Grant.

"Well, old chap, when we've had coffee we'll make tracks, but as we are here we may as well remain."

"Look!" exclaimed Grant, pointing to the hill beyond the river.

A single Zulu was creeping cautiously up the hill, looking back at every few yards in the direction of the kraal.

"He's been over the river spying out the land," said Beckman, laughing. "We're safe for an hour, at any rate; depend upon it, there are no Zulus in the long grass, or he would not be up there."

"I'm not so sure about it," replied Grant. "He may be doing it to put us off the scent."

Beckman shook his head.

"He's going to tell the main body we are here," he said. "They'll come back, hoping to catch us like rats in a trap, and find the birds flown. Our guide was right. I guess there's heaps of Zulus the other side of that hill. We'll ride back, after coffee, and send some one to root them out."

Grant was not convinced. He looked at the tall Tambookie grass, the Kaffir corn, the mealies, and in every movement of the long heads fancied he detected a hidden enemy. Hal Beckman seemed in no hurry to join the men, who were sitting near a hut waiting for him. He looked through his glasses at the climbing Zulu, watching him until he disappeared. Grant became impatient, and said—

"How about coffee? It will be cold."

They walked to where the rest of the party were seated, and joined them.

There was a good deal of freedom permitted in the Natal Horse, and on such occasions as this all fraternised, and conversation was general. Many of the troopers were men of good families, who had joined the Horse out of love of adventure, and the Captain knew how to handle them. Discipline was strict, but Hal Beckman was no martinet, and there was a comradeship between him and his men that caused a good deal of envy in other quarters.

The men lolled about at their ease, sipping coffee, and chatting. The native guide sat on the stone wall looking towards the tall grass; he too had seen the Zulu crawling up the rise, and was of the same opinion as the Captain, that the main body lay on the other side of the hill.

"We'll try and discover how many of them there are," said Hal. "Which is the best way to get at them?"

The guide said they would have to ford the river at a spot some five or six miles lower down, and then skirt round the foot of the hill; there was an open space on the other side suitable for a Zulu camp.

"I suppose there are none of the sneaking fellows hidden in the mealies?" said a trooper.

"No," replied the Captain. "Depend upon it, that solitary individual is conveying intelligence to

his comrades, but they will not find us here when they arrive."

Beckman seemed inclined to linger longer than usual. He seemed to have fallen into a reverie; his thoughts were far away from this Kaffir kraal.

Grant Halstead watched him curiously. He knew much of Beckman's life, knew how he had married the daughter of David Ribot, the rich Cape Town merchant, much against his wish; in fact it was a runaway match, and Ribot had never forgiven them.

Denise Ribot was one of the belles of Cape Town, and her father intended her to make a good match. He selected an enormously wealthy, half-bred Dutchman for her, but Denise would have none of him, regarding the man with disgust, even repulsion. Threats proved of no avail; the daughter was as obstinate as her father. When handsome, dashing Hal Beckman visited Cape Town, Denise Ribot's fate was sealed. They were desperately in love, and when Denise pointed out the selected Dutchman to him he vowed by all the powers he could summon to express his determination that she should never marry such "a mountain of fat."

He asked David Ribot for his daughter's hand and met with an insulting refusal. Hal Beckman was not the man to stand insults, even from the father of his beloved. So he told Ribot many things about himself and the way in which he had made his money, that caused the rich man to writhe under the lash of his tongue.

Hal vowed he would marry Denise, no matter what Ribot might say or do, and when the irate merchant threatened to disown her if she allied herself to such a worthless reprobate, Hal said—

"It will be the best thing you ever did for her in your life."

They had been married four years, and had one child, a fine little fellow named Harold, after his father.

"Father might relent if we called him David," said Denise, but Hal would not hear of it.

Grant thought of Denise Beckman and her child as he watched Hal, who, with his eyes closed, seemed half asleep. He wished his friend would not take so many risks, for his wife and child's sake; it was not fair to them, for he had very little money, and they would find it a hard matter to live without him.

At last the Captain rose, stretched himself, and gave the order to saddle.

The men went to their horses, and quickly obeyed; truth to tell, they were nothing loath to get out of the kraal, surrounded as it was by such excellent cover for spying Zulus.

The men were preparing to mount, and Hal Beckman had just placed one hand on the stirrup leather, and the other on the cantel of the saddle, when a terrific yell was heard in the direction of the Tambookie grass. Shots were fired, and the startled horses plunged and reared.

With loud cries of "Usutu! Usutu!" a horde of Zulus broke cover and rushed for the kraal.

CHAPTER II

KISMET

THE horses plunged frantically; it was with difficulty the men scrambled into the saddles. Beckman's horse was a splendid charger given him by sundry admirers in Cape Town, a beautiful bay standing sixteen hands or over, with a white star on his forehead. He was six years old, and had been well trained for his work, but this sudden outburst of savagery terrified him.

Kismet reared and plunged, while Hal Beckman attempted to mount. He was a clever horseman, one of the best in the mounted troops, accustomed to vault into the saddle with ease. He failed to grasp the reins, but clung to the saddle desperately, trying to fling himself up.

Grant Halstead, safely mounted, saw the men preparing to gallop off; turning round, he realised the fix his comrade was in.

He called out to the men to halt. Three of the troopers succeeded in controlling their horses, but the others failed, and their frightened steeds tore furiously away.

"The Captain's down; come back," yelled Grant, as he forced his horse backwards, almost on to its haunches.

Without hesitation the three men charged full at the mob of yelling Zulus, considerably over fifty in number.

They had been concealed in the Tambookie grass and mealies, waiting for a favourable moment to attack. All were powerful men, with fierce faces, hatred gleaming in their dark eyes. They hurled assegais at the three troopers as they rode at them; one fell from his saddle, the remaining two came straight on, until they were lost in the howling throng.

This unexpected charge caused a brief diversion in Hal Beckman's favour, but Kismet was beyond control.

Grant Halstead galloped up to the Captain, shouting—

"Give me your hand. Spring up behind me. Let Kismet go, it's your only chance."

"Clear out, or we'll both be done for," was Beckman's reply, but Grant refused to move.

The Zulus were all round them, throwing and brandishing assegais; it was marvellous neither of them was hit.

Seeing Grant determined, Beckman tried to get up behind, and almost succeeded, when an assegai struck him in the side and he fell to the ground.

"I'm done," shouted Beckman. "Think of Denise and the little chap, old fellow."

Two more assegais struck the Captain; one entering his eye, piercing his brain, he fell back dead.

Grant, seeing it was all over, and with his comrade's last words ringing in his ears, set spurs to his horse and galloped away. On every side Zulus yelled and aimed at him. He felt a sharp pain in his leg, another in his shoulder, a third sting drew blood from his cheek. Firing six shots from his revolver he accounted for as many Zulus, then he hurled the empty

weapon full in the face of a big, powerful fellow who was about to hurl an assegai at his chest; the black went down like a log. Having lost his carbine in the mêlée, he was weaponless; his only chance of escape lay in his horse. Fortunately Torch was fast, and the savage yells behind and on either side lent him additional speed. He crashed through a body of Zulus barring his path, bowling some over, scattering the remainder in all directions. As Grant moved away in a half-conscious condition, his enemies ran after him. They were fleet-footed, accustomed to run long distances, and it was some time before they slackened in the chase.

At last they gave up, turning back towards the kraal.

Torch galloped on, unguided by his rider, who mechanically sat in the saddle staring straight before him. The horse, with the wonderful sagacity possessed by his breed, steered in a direct line for the main camp. It was about an hour and a half after the attack that Torch brought his half-dead rider into a place of safety amongst his comrades. Willing hands lifted him from the saddle and medical assistance was soon obtained. Fortunately none of his wounds were serious, but a severe bruise on the back of his head accounted for his dazed condition.

When Grant had sufficiently recovered he gave an account of the fight.

"Where's Captain Beckman?" was asked on all sides.

Grant shook his head sadly, explaining how he had stood by him until he was struck down.

"Three of the men charged into the howling mob," he said. "It was gloriously done, at the cost of their lives; all honour to them. Three were carried off by their horses: it was no fault of theirs; no one is to blame. Poor Beckman, it's a terrible job for his men, worse for his wife and child. She'll see it in the papers; there will be no one to break the blow. My God! I wish I could help her. He asked me."

It was easy to guess from Grant's story that it was Captain Beckman's fault that they rode into the ambuscade. His recklessness was well known, and now it had led to his death. There was universal grief throughout the camp, and the men of the Natal Horse were not to be consoled.

Later on the three troopers who had escaped came in, much crestfallen at the part they had been compelled to play; they would have chosen to die with their comrades had fate so willed.

Next day Grant insisted upon going out with the troop to endeavour if possible to recover the bodies. It was a sad journey; they had to be cautious, in case the Zulus were still in force at the kraal. Scouts were sent out, and reported the grass and corn clear of the enemy, so the main body rode on.

The kraal was deserted. Captain Beckman's body lay where he had fallen. The corpse had been stripped and treated in the usual Zulu way, but not mutilated. There were many assegai wounds in front, showing he had been speared several times as he lay on his back. The bodies of the three

troopers were also recovered, all being conveyed back to the camp.

It was a mournful procession, and many a hardened trooper shed tears as the body of their beloved leader was carried in.

After a brief consultation, it was decided the body should be taken to Cape Town as rapidly as the state of the country permitted.

Grant Halstead wished to accompany it, but had been appointed to take the dead man's place as leader of Beckman's Horse, and had no choice but to remain on the spot. He wrote a long sympathetic letter to Mrs. Beckman, toning down the details as much as possible, praising the heroic qualities of her late husband. He concluded by saying that when he arrived in Cape Town he should take the first opportunity of seeing her and delivering her husband's last message.

"It was given to me as he fell back dying," he wrote, "and I prefer to tell it you personally."

When Grant had somewhat recovered from the shock of the loss of his friend he thought of Kismet, wondering what had become of the horse.

"He's too good to lose," he said. "I must try and find him. Probably he's been captured by some Boer farmer, or he would have come into camp."

Time went on; a month passed, and still there was no news of Kismet, although inquiries were made in all directions.

Some weeks later, however, the horse was brought into the camp of the Natal Horse by a Kaffir, who stated he had found him wandering about with no saddle or bridle on.

Grant suspected the Kaffir had disposed of both articles, but thought it best to say nothing. He rewarded the native and took over Kismet, meaning to keep him until such time as he could hand him over to Mrs. Beckman. Kismet soon took to his new master, and Grant thought he had never ridden such a good horse.

The Zulu War continued, and Grant Halstead, at the head of Beckman's Horse, did excellent service. The troopers avenged the death of their leader gallantly, and the exploits of the Natal Horse were narrated fully in the Press.

In England their doings attracted considerable attention, and Captain Grant Halstead's name was well known as that of a daring, dashing leader.

It was some years before the Zulu War broke out that Grant Halstead left home for South Africa. He did not get on well with his father, who wished him to follow the legal profession. Grant was not cut out for a student, and most of his time was spent in following various sports. This exasperated his father who, in a fit of disappointment at his favourite son's neglect of duty, said—

"You had better leave the country, for you do no good in it. If you go on as you are doing, you will end in disgracing me."

"That I will never do," replied Grant. "If you wish me to go I will. Give me something to start on, and I'll go to South Africa."

"A hundred pounds, not a penny more, and you must pay your fare. Mind, don't take a return ticket," replied his father, who had no idea his son would take him at his word.

Grant did so, however, and no amount of persuasion induced him to alter his determination.

"You promised me a hundred pounds; you cannot go back on your word," he said. "Give it me, and let me go."

After some demur his father did so, wishing all the time Grant would remain in England, even if he spent the money.

Grant booked his passage, showed the ticket to his father, and this settled the matter.

"You'll soon be home again," said Martin Halstead. "You'll find South Africa is not a very nice place to live in. What do you intend doing when you arrive there?"

"I'm sure to find a job," said Grant, hopefully.

When the steamer left, his father's parting words were—

"If you are stuck up and want to come home, don't forget I'll help you, Grant."

For some months Grant Halstead found Cape Town a jolly place to live in. When his money was spent he joined the Natal Horse, at his friend Beckman's suggestion. The two men had met in Cape Town and become fast friends.

When the Zulu War broke out there was plenty of work for the Natal Horse.

It was with much pride that Martin Halstead read of his son's promotion to the command of Beckman's Horse, and of his gallant deeds at the head of his troopers.

"I always knew the lad had plenty of grit in him," he said. "I am glad I sent him out to the Cape; it has been the making of him."

"Did you send him out, my dear?" said Mrs. Halstead. "I was under the impression you tried your best to persuade him to remain at home."

To this remark Mr. Halstead judiciously made no reply.

CHAPTER III

LOVE *v.* GOLD

IT was a terrible shock to Denise Beckman when the news of her husband's death reached Cape Town. She read the account in the papers, and the details were fully described. She pictured to herself how he died, and knew his bravery and rashness had been the cause. It was some consolation to her to read the glowing encomiums passed upon him and to know his name was highly honoured by those in authority, and also by the public generally. Grant Haistead's conduct was extolled, and she knew he had done all in his power to save his comrade and friend.

All the papers were carefully put aside; she meant to show them

to little Hal when he was able to read and understand for himself.

When she had somewhat recovered from the shock she considered her position seriously, and found she had very little money. Fortunately the authorities granted her a small annuity in recognition of her husband's services to the country, for which she was thankful.

David Ribot was not at all sorry at his son-in-law's fate. He had not forgiven him for marrying Denise, nor did he feel disposed to make his peace with his daughter unless she complied with his wishes.

Denise was too proud to go to her father in her trouble; probably she expected little sympathy from him.

"If he understands how I feel, and the loss I have sustained, he will come to me," she thought.

When she learned Captain Beckman's body was to be brought to Cape Town she was thankful. The funeral caused her sorrow to break forth afresh, but it was some relief to know where his body lay in peace. It was a wonderful demonstration of public sympathy, and thousands of people followed the dead leader to his last resting-place. Even David Ribot had to confess that "the man was popular," but added that "the public were always ready to make fools of themselves over a military display." When he learned an annuity had been granted to Denise he was disappointed; he hoped she would have been compelled to return to him in her trouble and make her home with him.

A few weeks after Captain Beckman's funeral Paul Schalk was closeted with David Ribot in his office. Schalk was the half-bred Dutchman who had wished to marry Denise. He was rich, his only recommendation to any woman, for he was not a desirable man in other ways. He was short and fat, with a dull, heavy face, overhanging cheeks, a double chin, little sunken eyes, and a stubbly beard and moustache that refused to grow to an ordinary length. His hair was coarse, his hands large and rough, his feet in keeping with the enormous weight they had to support. His stomach protruded in an objectionable way, and when he walked he waddled like a duck. His speech was thick, and the words seemed to echo from some deep cavern. Such a man was not likely to win a woman like Denise.

When Schalk heard of Captain Beckman's death he rubbed his hands, chuckling, saying to himself—

"This will give me another chance. She'll be badly off and have to go to old Ribot, and then we'll see what happens."

He smacked his fat lips in a disgusting way over the prospect, and gloried in his possessions, which he thought would obtain him what he desired.

For decency's sake he was compelled to keep in the background; but after a time he hinted to David Ribot that his feelings towards Denise were unchanged.

They looked a curiously repulsive pair as they sat in Ribot's office. It was a dingy, dirty, untidy room. Papers littered the floor, the windows had not been

cleaned for weeks, the paper on the walls was black and greasy.

Ribot sat in a hard chair, leaning one arm on his desk, while Schalk looked uncomfortable, wedged into a seat much too small for his ponderous body. It was hot, oppressive, and Schalk from time to time wiped his shiny face with a soiled handkerchief. He looked like a man who had not washed after a long dusty railway journey.

David Ribot was rich, but not so rich as Paul Schalk, which annoyed him. He begrudged the Dutchman his wealth because the bulk of it had been left him, while he, David Ribot, had toiled hard to earn money.

For the first time since Hal Beckman's death, Paul Schalk put the question plainly to David Ribot—

"I want to marry your daughter," he said. "I want her more than I did before. She's young, and marriage has improved her. Will you help me to get her?"

David Ribot considered before answering. If Paul Schalk got Denise, he, Ribot, meant to have a good round sum down for her. His daughter was a "marketable commodity," and worth a good deal to such a man as Schalk. Even Ribot felt a feeling of repulsion as he looked at his fat, greasy face.

"It seems to take a lot of thinking out," said Schalk, grumbling. "You were eager enough for me to take her once."

"Maybe," said Ribot, musingly.

"And ar'n't you as ready for me to have her now?"

"Perhaps I am. After all, it's Denise we have to deal with," said Ribot.

"She's poor. She's only a paltry hundred or so a year. She can't live on that. She'll have to give in," said Schalk.

"Will she? You don't know her as well as I do," said Ribot.

"I'll settle a stiff sum on her," said Schalk.

"And on the lad?"

"No, hang him! He'll have to shift for himself. I'm not going to keep the brat of the man who took the mother from me."

"That settles it," said Ribot.

"Settles what?"

"She'll never take any man who will not provide for the child."

"Nonsense. It's a lad; if it happened to be a girl it would be different: lads can shift for themselves."

"If you wish to win her you must make a fuss of the child; that's your best way."

Paul Schalk shook his head until his fat cheeks wobbled from side to side.

"If I make a fuss of him before I get her, there's no reason why I should keep it up afterwards," he said.

"But there is; that's where you are mistaken. If you don't behave well to the child she'll leave you," said Ribot.

Paul Schalk opened his little eyes as wide as possible.

"You really mean that?" he said.

"I do, I know her."

"If it comes to that, I'll settle so much on the lad. Will that satisfy her?"

"Not if you decline to let him be with her."

"He can live in the house, so long as he keeps out of my way; I don't want to be constantly reminded of his father."

"There's another little matter," said Ribot.

"Let me hear it."

"What do you propose to hand over to me if I help you?"

Paul Schalk looked surprised as he said—

"Is it not enough if I marry her and take her off your hands?"

"No, my friend, it is not," replied Ribot; "not by a long way."

"You wish me to buy her?" said Schalk sarcastically.

"No, I do not. I wish you to pay me for services rendered."

"It amounts to the same thing."

"I'd rather put it my way."

"Then it's to be a hard and fast bargain," said Schalk.

"Yes."

"And you must carry out your part."

"I will do my best."

"That won't satisfy me."

"I cannot force her to marry you," said Ribot.

"She ought not to require forcing; it's a good match for her," replied Schalk sulkily.

"She may not think so; she refused you once, she may do so again."

"If she had no pension she'd give in," said Schalk.

"But she has, so what is the use of talking about it?"

"It might be stopped."

"None of your underhand meddling over that," said Ribot.

"You're particular all at once," replied Schalk.

"I'll not have her annuity interfered with; of course, if she marries it ceases."

"What do you propose?" asked Schalk.

"Give me ten thousand the day you marry her," said Ribot.

Schalk laughed as he replied, "You must think I'm a fool. I shall not give you half."

"Then you will not get her," said Ribot.

"You can't stop me."

"Yes I can."

"How?"

"That's what I know."

Paul Schalk knew David Ribot could effectually put a stopper to his projects; he also knew he had a very remote chance of securing Denise without her father's assistance.

"Ten thousand is too much," he said.

"How much will you settle on her?" asked Ribot.

"Twenty thousand."

"And on the boy?"

"Half that; no, five thousand, I mean."

"You'll do that absolutely, no matter what may happen after the marriage?"

"Yes. Once I get her, she'll not find it an easy matter to get rid of me," said Schalk, grinning.

"And what am I to get?" asked Ribot.

"I'll make over five thousand to you the day I marry her."

"In that case I must have a thousand down in addition."

"You're a screw," said Schalk hotly.

"You need screwing down," was the reply.

The two men talked and argued

for some time; eventually Schalk agreed to all Ribot's terms; he had no option.

They did not consider they were a pair of scoundrels to barter for a woman; they would have gone further than that, if necessary.

Before Paul Schalk left Ribot's office he had signed a document embodying all David's proposals, and it was duly witnessed.

As Ribot locked it in his safe he said—

"You must not expect to succeed at once, it will be a matter of time. She'll not get over her loss in a hurry. She was in love with the man. She'll never be in love with you."

"Why not, if I give her all she wants?" asked Schalk.

"You can't give her all she wants."

"I have more money than you are aware of."

"Probably, but you'll not be able to purchase love; it's not saleable—at least, I've been so informed."

"If it's a question of love or gold, I'll back gold," said Schalk.

"That's because you know nothing about love," said Ribot.

"Do you?" sneered Schalk.

"Yes."

"Then it must be a long time ago."

"It is."

"Who was she?"

"That I loved?"

"Yes."

"Denise's mother."

"And she?"

"Left me."

"Oh!"

There was a curious look on David Ribot's face.

"Why did she leave you?" asked Schalk.

"She did nothing wrong, don't think that. We separated. It was a case of love and gold; I thought too much of money."

"Then gold proved the stronger; I'm right after all," said Schalk.

"No, you are wrong. I'd give all the gold I possess to get her back and start fresh," said Ribot.

Schalk stared at him; then he said—

"I don't suppose you'll try the experiment, all the same."

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"She is dead."

"Does your daughter know about this?" asked Schalk.

"No, she was too young to understand," said Ribot.

CHAPTER IV

HER PROTECTOR

FOR some months after her husband's death Denise was left in peace. Her thoughts were centred on her son, and she wondered what he would be when he grew up. He favoured his father in looks, and she hoped he would follow in his footsteps.

Grant Halstead's letter pleased her; in him she had a staunch friend. What was the message her husband had given to him as he fell back dying? She wished

he had given it her in the letter, but no doubt he had some good reason for not doing so. She answered the letter, received a reply, and they corresponded regularly. Grant asked her to let him know if she was in any trouble or needed help, in which case he would do all in his power to assist her. He told her of the recovery of Kismet, saying he was using him as a charger until such time as he could hand him over to her. She wrote back, begging him to keep the horse in memory of her husband, to which he replied that they could talk the matter over when he saw her after the war.

Denise was much surprised when her father called to see her. She did not expect him to make any advances. He spoke kindly to her, asking about her future plans and so on. She wondered at the sudden interest he manifested in her, not being altogether satisfied he was in earnest. She suspected there was something in the background, and was not mistaken.

Soon after her father's visit she found Paul Schalk waiting for her on her return home. She was exceedingly angry with him for venturing to enter the house during her absence, and wished to know the reason of his unwelcome visit.

"I hoped my presence would not be unwelcome," he said. "I wish to help you."

"I do not require any assistance, least of all from you," she replied.

"My love for you must be my excuse for calling," he said plaintively.

He looked ridiculous; the expression on his fat face was ludicrous, his chubby hands were squeezed together until the flesh bulged out, his huge feet resembled two dark islands on the floor. He sat half out of the chair, his form being too ponderous to occupy it.

Denise could not help laughing at the spectacle. Annoyed and angry as she was, it proved too much for her.

"You may laugh at my love," he said, still in the same melancholy tones.

"Indeed I do not," she said, still laughing.

"Then what is it amuses you?"

"Yourself. I never saw a more absurd figure," she said.

Had she laughed at his offer of love he would not have been surprised—he was prepared for it; but that his appearance should cause her so much amusement irritated him.

Paul Schalk had a very good opinion of himself. Some women of his acquaintance had gone so far as to call him "a fine man," and he believed them. "I hate thin men, fat men are more generous," said one young person in an endeavour to extract money from him.

Denise ceased laughing, but the angry look in her eyes changed to one of merriment. She decided to treat him with ridicule—it was beneath her to lose her temper over this mountain of flesh.

Schalk noted the change; it might be in his favour. She was more likely to listen to him if she was not angry.

"I can't help being fat," he said. "I've always been fat. I was a very fine child."

"I am sure you were," said

Denise. "Your mother must have staggered under her burden. I wonder she never let you fall."

"She was too fond of me."

"You were a spoilt child," she said.

"I was."

"You look it. You are still a spoilt child."

"Am I?"

"Yes, because you have developed into a most ridiculous man," she answered.

"Come, that's rather rough on me, Mrs. Beckman," he said—he was about to say "my dear," but checked himself in time.

"A little rough handling would do you good," she said.

"It would not be well for the man who tried to handle me roughly," he said.

Again she laughed, as she imagined him struggling with a man—like Grant Halstead, for instance.

"If I'm big, I'm active," he said.

"So is an elephant," was the reply. "Do you swim?"

"No. What a silly question! Why do you ask?"

"Because in case you did I would advise you not to do so in an up-country river; you might be taken for a hippopotamus."

"Come, come, that's too bad," he said. "I am sure you do not mean to insult me."

"That would be impossible."

"I came here to ask you a very important question," he said.

"I do not wish to hear it; nothing you say can be of any importance to me."

"But it is, I assure you."

"You are mistaken, and I have no desire to listen to you."

"I want you to be my wife——" he commenced.

"How dare you!" she interrupted. "Leave my house at once."

"I am here with your father's sanction," he went on, unheeding her outburst.

"Oh, I thought so!" she exclaimed; adding to herself, "So that is why he called; I might have known it."

"If you will marry me I will settle a large sum on you, and on your son," he said.

Her son! Settle a large sum on her son! The words rang in her ears. If little Hal had money he might rise in the world. Her annuity was small, she could save nothing for him.

Paul Schalk watched her as a cat watches a mouse. He saw her hesitate, and guessed the cause.

"I'll settle a very large sum indeed on your child if you will marry me," he said eagerly. "It will give him a chance in life."

"How much would you settle on him?" she asked in a dull, mechanical voice.

"Ten thousand," said Schalk, in his eagerness to capture her.

She looked astonished; it was a large sum.

"I will settle twenty thousand on you," he said.

"Absolutely for my own?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Thirty thousand," she thought. "It is a fortune. Ought I to deprive my boy of such a chance?"

The door was thrust open and in bounded Hal, tumbling down in his hurry.

Paul Schalk made a violent

effort to reach him; the chair creaked, swayed, gave way, and he slipped on to the floor. Hal on his hands and knees looked at him, then said—

"What an ugly fat man, mother. Who is he?"

Paul Schalk turned red tinged with purple; he seemed on the verge of explosion.

"Look at him, mother. Isn't he funny?" said Hal, in childish glee. "Get up, fat man," he said as he scrambled to his feet.

Paul Schalk was in a towering rage; this youngster had spoilt his game just as he was playing his cards so well.

Denise recovered herself. Thirty thousand pounds. He would be dear at treble that sum. How could she ever have thought of selling herself to him! The mere idea caused a shudder of repulsion.

Hal took his mother's hand and stood by her side. In him Paul Schalk recognised a protector who was too strong for him, still he had no intention of relinquishing his purpose.

"Then you do not like this gentleman?" said Denise, in calm, cutting tones.

"He's a nasty man," said Hal. "Send him away."

"You don't know me," said Schalk, smothering his wrath. "I am very good to little boys. Come here, I have something for you."

Hal refused to leave his mother.

Schalk held out a sovereign; it glittered in the light.

"Come and fetch it," he said to Hal, but the lad shook his head.

"Gold will not buy him, or me," said Denise.

"If you do not accept my offer you will stand in your child's light," he said.

"He would never forgive me when he came to understand," she replied.

Schalk made another attempt to induce Hal to come to him, but without avail.

"Obstinate little beggar," thought Schalk. "If ever I have the chance I'll whack him for this."

There was an awkward pause, and Schalk said—

"Consider my offer, Mrs. Beckman. I will give you time. If you accept it, I will give you all you desire. I am deeply in earnest about it."

"Please go. I do not wish to see you again," said Denise.

"I shall not give you up. Your father approves of my offer and will support me."

"That makes no difference."

"You will find me determined," said Schalk.

"Not more so than I am."

Schalk held out his hand, but she did not take it. He patted Hal on the head and the child shrank from him. This was too much for Schalk, who left the house raging against both Denise and her son.

"I'll have her," he muttered. "I'll have her, somehow, even if I use force."

He thought of a lonely farm he had many miles away. If he got her there, he could tame her, and bring her to reason through her child. At this moment he was mad enough to consider any means of securing her; later on he cooled down, but at intervals thought again of the isolated place,

wondering if it would be possible to take her there.

"You do not like him?" said Denise, when Schalk was gone.

"No," said Hal emphatically, "he's a bad man."

"He is," said Denise; "he wished to take your mother away."

Little Hal looked into her face, and said angrily—

"I will not let him take my mother away."

She kissed him and said—

"He shall not, Hal; no one shall ever part us."

"When is father coming home?" asked Hal.

She had kept the news of his father's death from him. She wondered if he would understand if she told him now.

"Hal, listen to me," she said. "You will never see your father again. He was killed by the Zulus, fighting against the savages. He was a very brave man, but there were too many for him. I did not tell you before; I thought perhaps you would not understand."

Hal was silent; then two big tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Poor daddy!" he said. "I am so sorry for you, mother."

The child thought of her first. This gave her comfort. She took him in her arms and kissed him.

"Don't cry, my pet," she said. "Every one honoured your father; he was the bravest of the brave. Some day I will tell you all about it—when you are older."

"Did he kill many Zulus?" asked Hal.

"Yes, they were afraid of him."

"I'm glad of that. I'd like to kill Zulus, because they killed my father."

"Then you would like to be a soldier, Hal?"

"Yes, and fight; and then I could take care of you, and not let that nasty fat man come here. Will he come again?"

"I hope not, Hal; I told him not to do so."

"If he does, mother, I'll kick him," said Hal fiercely.

CHAPTER V

SHADOWED

PAUL SCHALK continued to pester Denise with unwelcome attentions at every available opportunity. She avoided him, but it was impossible always to succeed in doing so. She knew her father encouraged Schalk, which made him bolder, more determined.

At last she became more than annoyed: she was afraid of she knew not what.

Schalk suddenly changed his tactics. He ceased calling upon her; but she had an uneasy feeling that she was watched and followed.

Denise was by no means timid, but she was lonely, defenceless, and had read of cases where women had been abducted and forced into marriage; one instance came within her personal knowledge.

Her house was watched; she was sure of it. This threatened

danger from Schalk, how was she to avoid it? She became terrified at the thought that perhaps it was Hal he was after. If she lost her child, and he fell into the hands of Schalk, she would indeed be defenceless. So unbearable did this state of uncertainty become that she decided to appeal to her father. She was hard pressed to do this—it was a shock to her self-esteem—but there was no help for it.

David Ribot expected her visit; he was prepared for it.

"So you have come to me at last," he said; "it would have been better for you to have done so earlier."

She had Hal with her. She never let him out of her sight; and the child looked at his grandfather with curious, inquiring eyes. He knew this was his mother's father, and could not understand why they were so distant, like strangers. Why didn't his mother kiss her father as he kissed her?

"We cannot talk in front of the child," said David.

"We must; I am afraid to lose sight of him," she said.

"Why? He is safe enough in my house. You don't suppose any one will run away with him?"

"But I do," she replied.

He laughed as he said—

"You must think him uncommonly attractive. He's like his father, I acknowledge; and he was a flash man."

"His father was a brave man, who died nobly fighting for his country; he was as handsome as he was courageous," she replied proudly.

"He was stuck like a pig by a lot of savages; that's not a very noble end," he retorted.

She winced at the brutal remark, but answered quietly—

"He is dead, and cannot answer you; had he lived you would not have dared to insult him. Only a coward speaks disrespectfully of the dead."

David Ribot grunted, shuffled uneasily in his chair, but made no reply to this. After a pause, he asked—

"Why have you called? To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions," she answered.

"Let me hear them. Please be quick; I am busy," he replied.

"Too busy to protect your daughter's honour, and maybe the life of her child," she said.

Her father turned round angrily as he said—

"What stuff and nonsense is this you are talking? Ask your questions and have done with them."

"Are you aware that Paul Schalk still desires to make me his wife?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Do you sanction it?"

Again he nodded.

"Is it by your wish he has me spied upon, followed everywhere, my house watched, my child in danger of being abducted?" she said.

David Ribot laughed as he said—

"You are mad to talk of such things."

"Paul Schalk has employed men to watch me and my child; he means mischief. I ask you to protect me, to make him cease this persecution."

"I must first ascertain whether your surmises are correct," he said.

"They are correct, and you know it!"

"I do not," he answered quickly; and she thought he spoke the truth.

She gave him reasons for her suspicions, to which he listened attentively; after a time he said—

"Why don't you accept him? He is rich. He will settle a large sum on you and your son. It is your only chance, so far as I can see."

"I hate the man; you know I can never marry him. I am your only child; you are also rich. It is your duty to support me," she said.

"You married the man of your choice," he answered. "When you did so you relieved me of all responsibility. You have made your bed, you must lie upon it."

"You refuse to protect me from Paul Schalk?"

"You need no protection from him. He wishes to marry you. I wish it. Be reasonable and do so, and you will be comfortably settled for life, and your child will be provided for."

"I would sooner starve than marry him," she answered.

"Then, my dear daughter, until you are in a more reasonable frame of mind I cannot help you," he said.

"Is that your final decision?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall place the matter in the hands of the police," she said quietly.

David Ribot started; he had no desire to be mixed up in a police case, for good reasons of his own. Illicit diamond-buying was severely punished, and Ribot was regarded with some suspicion in connection with sundry deals that had taken place.

"Do nothing so foolish," he said. "I assure you your suspicions are unfounded; Schalk would not have you shadowed."

"Unless you do as I ask, when I leave here I shall go direct to the police," she said.

He saw she was in earnest; after all, he might promise what she asked; it would satisfy her at any rate, and give him time to talk the matter over with Schalk.

"It will only make me ridiculous if I speak to him about your absurd suspicions," he said.

"Will you do it?" she asked again.

"If it will satisfy you, yes."

"Promise me."

"Certainly."

"Say it."

"What?"

"That you promise me to ask Paul Schalk to cease from persecuting me, and having me watched, and that if he does not do so you will take measures to prevent him," she said.

"Oh, very well," he said, and did as she asked.

As she was about to leave he said—

"Have you any money?"

The question surprised her; she was never able to trust him; she regretted it, but had no option. She mistrusted his offer now.

"I have plenty," she replied.

"If you are in want, short of funds, come to me," he said. "I want to show you I am not quite so hard-hearted as you think me."

"I will try to think better of

you," she replied. "Do as I ask, and you have promised; that will ensure confidence between us."

When she left him David Ribot sent for Schalk, who came immediately, hoping for good news.

"You have been making a fool of yourself," said Ribot, when he was seated in his office.

"If running after your daughter constitutes being a fool, I am one," he replied.

"I don't mean that. You have deceived me."

"In what way?"

"You have had her watched, and you did not tell me."

"Who says I have had her watched?"

"I do."

"It is not true."

"It is. What is your game?"

"I must have her," said Schalk excitedly.

"You are not going the right way about it. What do you mean to do with the child when you get hold of him?" asked Ribot suddenly.

The question took Schalk by surprise.

"The child!" he exclaimed. "What do I want with the brat?"

"That's precisely what I wish to know," said Ribot.

"He's of no use to me."

"Oh yes, he is."

"In what way?"

"If you had her child in your power, you fancy you could force his mother to comply with your wishes."

"That's not a bad idea of yours," said Schalk.

"It is not my idea, but your own," replied Ribot; "and let me tell you once and for all, you are a fool. If you think you can work this affair without me you are mistaken."

"I don't wish to work it without you."

"Then why not be open with me?" asked Ribot.

"I am."

"You are not. My daughter has been here; she has told me how you have had her followed, watched, and tried to get her child away from her."

"That's a lie," said Schalk.

"Then I'll say you would have abducted the child had you found it possible. Give up that plan—it will fail."

"Can you tell me a better?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Leave the whole thing in my hands."

"That means delay."

"Slow but sure."

"It would be far better for me to carry her off, get her in my power. I could force her to marry me," said Schalk.

"And how would that end?"

"I'd risk that, so long as I got her."

David Ribot considered for some minutes. Then he said—

"She threatened to tell the police if I did not warn you to drop this."

Schalk laughed as he said—

"I'm not afraid of the police. They'll not interfere with my sport."

"It's a risky game, abduction," said David.

"There'll be no risk to you," he answered.

"I'll tell you what," said Ribot. "Leave her to me for a few weeks,

and if I don't succeed in persuading her that to accept you is to secure her future happiness and welfare, I'll see how I can help you in your way."

"That's good," said Schalk. "You'll find my way the easiest. You shall have your money down the day she is in my hands."

"I'll take good care of that," thought Ribot.

Paul Schalk at last confessed he had paid men to follow Denise Beckman, and promised to give orders for the shadowing to cease.

"She'll feel more secure when she finds she is left alone," said David. "She'll be thankful to me for ridding her of this annoyance, and that will make her more inclined to listen to reason."

"She's very obstinate," said Paul.

"You'll find that out if you get her," said David.

CHAPTER VI

HAL MISSING

IT was with a sense of relief Denise received a letter from Grant Halstead, in which he mentioned it would not be many weeks before he was in Cape Town. With him close at hand she would not be afraid. Since the interview with her father the men she had noticed ceased to follow her, but she had not relaxed her vigilance over Hal.

Some weeks passed, and Paul Schalk was no nearer to obtaining what he desired. Angry scenes had taken place between him and Ribot.

At last, Schalk determined to obtain possession of Hal; it would be difficult, but he had no doubt of his succeeding.

David Ribot had a stormy interview with Denise, all to no purpurpose; she positively refused to marry Paul Schalk. Eventually Ribot sanctioned Schalk's proposed plan to obtain possession of the child.

"She is as obstinate as a mule," said Ribot. "I see no other way in which we can manage her; but, mind you, no harm must come to the child."

"I'll promise you that," said Schalk. "He shall be well treated."

So closely did Denise watch her son that Schalk began to despair.

Unfortunately Denise had an attack of fever, and was ordered to keep her bed. Hal was not allowed to come into her room, but was left in charge of the servant, a half-caste, who had been with Denise for some time.

It was her anxiety for the safety of her child retarded her recovery until the doctor became anxious about her. He knew there was something on her mind, and wished to find out what it was. He questioned her, but she steadfastly refused to explain.

"You will not get well until your mind is at ease," he said, and again pressed her to confide in him. He had known and admired Captain Beckman, and wished to help Denise.

Doctor Binder also knew David

Ribot, and had a slight acquaintance with Paul Schalk; he detested them, was aware they bore bad characters.

When Denise eventually related her fears to him, he recognised that she was right in distrusting them. He was a bachelor, and at first hesitated to make the offer that suggested itself, but after due consideration he proposed to her to take Hal to his house until she was able to get about again.

At first Denise refused, although she recognised the kindness which prompted his suggestion and thanked him for it.

"You cannot look after him here," said Dr. Binder; "he will be safer with me."

"But you are so often away from home," protested Denise.

"I can take him with me on my rounds," he said, "and at night he will be quite safe in my house."

When Dr. Binder asked Hal if he would like to stay with him until his mother was better, and proposed sundry drives about the town and country, the child said—

"If mother wishes it, I will go with you."

"That's a good lad. She will soon be well again, and you cannot see her while she is ill," said Dr. Binder.

Hal went to the doctor's and was delighted to drive about with him in his buggy.

Paul Schalk was quickly informed of the change of residence, and that Hal drove about with the doctor. How to get hold of the lad puzzled him, until one of the men in his pay said—

"We might be able to entice him from the buggy; he is sometimes left alone for a few minutes."

Dr. Binder had no suspicion that he was watched or followed. The horse he drove was accustomed to stand alone, and when he remained in a house longer than usual he hitched it by a loose rein to the nearest post.

One day he drove some miles out of town, Hal being with him. He took no notice of another buggy following at some distance.

Pulling up at a small house, he fastened the horse to the rails, telling Hal to sit quietly until he came back. He had not been inside more than five minutes when a man came up to the buggy and asked Hal where the doctor was.

"Inside there," said the lad, pointing to the house. "Do you want him?"

"Yes. Will you go in and tell him some one is very ill and requires him at once? Let me lift you down."

It did not occur to the child that the man might have gone to the door himself.

He slipped from his seat, the man held out his arms to lift him down. When he had him fast, the fellow stuffed something into his mouth to prevent him crying out, and ran quickly away with him. There was no one in sight; the place was lonely.

In a clump of trees, hidden from view, was a buggy with another man in.

Hal's captor quickly handed him up and said—

"If you cry out or make the least noise, I'll throttle you."

His fierce tones frightened the child, who trembled all over, and

he dared not call for help. The buggy was driven off at a rapid pace, the rug being thrown over Hal, almost suffocating him.

Dr. Binder was occupied with his patient for some time. When he came out and found the buggy empty, he concluded Hal, becoming tired of waiting, had scrambled down. He called him, but received no response.

"Gone round to the back of the house, I expect," he thought.

He searched high and low, but saw no signs of the child. He became alarmed; the recollection of what Mrs. Beckman had said to him made him nervous. Had any one taken the child away? It seemed impossible in broad daylight; it was too audacious.

For several hours he drove about the country diligently searching, but no trace of the boy could he find.

Hal had disappeared, there was no doubt about it. What had he better do?

Returning to Cape Town, he went straight home. Nothing had been seen of Hal; he did not expect it. He then went to the police office, where he was well known, and related his story, telling them of Mrs. Beckman's fears of an abduction.

"Schalk and Ribot," said the Inspector. "They are a couple of unscrupulous rogues. I'd like to catch them doing something wrong. Depend upon it, Doctor, they are at the bottom of it."

"Mrs. Beckman must know nothing of this; she is ill," he said. "I will leave the matter in your hands. No harm will come to the lad, I feel sure; it would not suit Schalk's purpose. He wishes to marry the mother."

The Inspector used strong language. "Marry that brute, after such a man as Beckman! It's not likely. Let me lay hands on the dogs, I'll make them squeal," he said savagely.

Dr. Binder was much upset. He called to see Mrs. Beckman, carefully concealing the disappearance of Hal from her.

Afterwards he went to David Ribot, who was already in possession of the facts.

Ribot pretended to be much alarmed, and hoped the police would soon find the child.

"Of course you know your daughter is seriously ill," said Dr. Binder.

"Seriously ill? No, I did not know that," he replied. "I knew you were attending her."

"If she became acquainted——" began the Doctor, when there was a knock at the door, and Paul Schalk entered in a hurry.

"It's all right——" he commenced, when he saw Dr. Binder and stopped in confusion. The Doctor was a keen-sighted man; he looked firmly at Schalk, who avoided his gaze.

"The fellow knows all about it," he thought; "so does Ribot."

"My daughter's son is missing," said Ribot. "He has been staying with Dr. Binder during her illness. He was in his buggy this morning, and someone spirited the lad away when he called on a patient. It is a most extraordinary affair; I cannot see any reason for it."

Paul Schalk feigned surprise, but it was ill-assumed, and Dr.

Binder had no difficulty in seeing through it.

"I have placed the matter in the hands of the police," he said.

"Quite right," said Ribot. "He can't be far away. They'll soon find him; perhaps after all he has tramped off on his own account."

"I do not think so for a moment," said Dr. Binder. "Some one has carried him off."

"For what reason?" asked Schalk.

"That remains to be discovered. Perhaps some one is anxious to influence his mother by preying upon her fears. If that is the case, and she learns her child is lost, in her present condition it might be fatal."

"Is she so very ill?" asked Schalk.

"Yes, and on no account must she learn of her loss. Do you suspect any one?" he asked, addressing Ribot.

"Me!" exclaimed Ribot. "No. Why do you ask?"

"You are her father; you are the most likely person to know."

"We have not been on good terms for some years—since her marriage," he said.

"Mr. Schalk has been paying his addresses to her, I believe," said Dr. Binder.

"I have," replied Schalk.

"Then perhaps you have heard her express her fears that the child might be abducted?"

"She has not mentioned it to me," he replied.

"As her medical adviser, I have issued orders that no one is to see her except myself."

"Surely her father can visit her?" said Schalk.

"He cannot. I forbid it."

"Of course I will not do so until Dr. Binder gives permission," said Ribot, looking at Schalk.

"You will naturally do all you can to find the child," said the Doctor.

"Most decidedly," said Ribot. "And I am sure Mr. Schalk will help me."

To this Paul Schalk heartily agreed.

"I would give a good round sum to be able to restore her child to her," he said.

"That would be a sure way to win her gratitude when she heard of it," said Dr. Binder, thinking perhaps Schalk would take the hint, and if he knew of the boy's whereabouts, give him up.

"Where is he?" asked Ribot, when the Doctor left. "You have not told me."

"He's safe enough."

"Where is he?"

"I'll keep that to myself."

"I wish to know."

"Then you'll have to keep on wishing."

"You will not tell me?"

"No."

"Very well, then, I wash my hands of the whole business, and you will not marry Denise."

"But I will, my friend."

"You will not."

"If I promise to restore her child she will accept me."

Ribot laughed as he said, "You must be very simple to think so. Once she knows you have the child she will hand you over to the police."

"And you?"

"I had nothing to do with it."

"That's your tale, not mine.

I can speak out when necessary," said Schalk.

"I didn't plan the abduction. I don't even know where the lad is."

"Supposing I tell you?" said Schalk. He seldom kept to his purpose; he was a weak, vacillating creature.

"That will alter the case," replied Ribot.

"He's not far from here."

"In Cape Town?"

"Yes."

"You're mad; they are sure to find him," said Ribot.

"They will not. He's as safe as if he was buried."

"Mind, no harm is to come to him."

"I promised you that."

"Out with it. Where have you hidden him?"

"He's at Dan Tupp's."

"In the hands of that scoundrel!" exclaimed Ribot. "What guarantee have you he'll come to no harm?"

"The best of guarantees; if he is not treated properly Dan receives no pay."

"I don't like it," said Ribot. "He's a bad lot."

"All the better for our purpose."

"The police are sure to search for him in that quarter."

"They will not. Such things are not in Dan's line; that's why I selected him for the job, and he's done it cleverly," said Schalk.

"How are you going to make use of the lad now you have him?" asked Ribot.

"As soon as your daughter is well enough to see me, I'll make that right. If she consents to marry me, she shall have her child."

"She will not consent."

"Then I shall tell her his life depends upon it."

"You will go as far as that?"

"Yes, why not? I don't mean it," said Schalk. "I shall tell her, if she informs the police, or refuses to marry me, she will never see him alive again."

"You're a brute," said Ribot.

"There's a pair of us," answered Schalk, grinning.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE NICK OF TIME

DENISE BECKMAN recovered slowly, and it was some weeks after Hal's disappearance that she was able to get out of bed. When the danger was past she at once asked Dr. Binder about her son.

The Doctor was in a difficulty; he did not wish to agitate his patient. If he prevaricated she would suspect something wrong; if he told her the truth the effect might be disastrous; still it was better to let her know the facts at once, instead of administering a double shock by first avoiding a direct reply.

"Can I have Hal back with me now?" she asked.

"Perhaps he had better remain

a few days longer," he replied. Any delay, however small, would be of use; the lad might be found.

She agreed to another week, but at the end of that time it was useless to ask for any extension. Gradually Dr. Binder broke the news to her, concealing nothing, blaming himself for leaving the boy alone in the buggy.

Mrs. Beckman was not so agitated as he expected: she was calm, too calm, he thought. It would have been better for her to relieve her feelings in an outburst of grief. There was a glitter in her eyes he did not like; it reminded him of some wild animal suddenly deprived of its young.

She did not blame him, for which he was thankful; but he saw she felt bitter against him, and he did not wonder at it.

"I have searched in all sorts of places," he said, "so have the police. Of one thing I am almost certain, he has come to no harm."

"He is in the hands of Paul Schalk," she said; "and my father knows where he is. No, he will not come to any harm. If they think to force me to do as they wish, through fear for the child, they are mistaken."

"Would you like to see the Inspector?" asked Dr. Binder.

"No; but I will see Paul Schalk," she said.

"Such an interview would greatly excite you: you ought to avoid it, you are not strong enough to bear it."

"It will excite me still more if I cannot regain my child," she replied.

"Probably Schalk will call," he said.

"I am sure he will," she answered.

"You will see him alone?"

"Yes."

"You have no fear?"

"None whatever; he is a coward," she said, with contempt.

A day or two later Paul Schalk came to see her, and was admitted. He was surprised at the change in her. She was pale and looked weak; probably this would be to his advantage in their interview.

He commenced by sympathising with her over her illness, and then said—

"I have heard of the strange disappearance of your child; it is most extraordinary. Can you imagine any reason for the abduction?"

"Yes," she answered calmly.

He seemed surprised, as he said—

"Neither your father nor myself can think of any excuse for such an act."

"There is no excuse."

"Perhaps I used the wrong word," he said.

"You did."

"Will you tell me what you think? I may be able to help you," he said.

"I know who stole my child," she said, looking straight at him.

He started: she could not possibly guess that Dan Tupp had the lad in his keeping: then laughed uneasily, as he said—

"In that case it ought to be an easy matter to recover him."

"It is, very easy, with your assistance."

"How can I help you?"

"As you stole my child, you can give him back to me," she said.

"Your accusation is false," he answered angrily.

"If you did not actually kidnap him, you caused some one to do it."

"Your suspicions are entirely wrong. What possible reason could I have for wanting the boy?"

"To force me, through fear for him, to marry you."

He laughed, then said—

"Such a marriage would not be satisfactory. I want you to consent willingly."

"Which I shall never do. Where is my child?"

"I have no idea, but I will try and find him, if you will promise to marry me when I restore him to you!"

"Then you know where he is?"

"I have not said so."

"But you do."

"Will you marry me if I bring him to you in three or four days?" he asked eagerly.

"No; but I will force you to give him up," she replied.

The bad blood in Paul Schalk was uppermost; he looked dangerous. Denise was frightened, although she concealed it. He pulled his chair nearer, facing her, and said in a low, guttural voice—

"You dare not force me to give him up."

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "Then you know where he is?"

"Supposing I do, what then?"

"I will tell the police."

"Do so," he answered calmly, with a wicked grin which alarmed her; but she meant to go on.

"I will send for Dr. Binder at once; he will help me to denounce you."

"What then?" he asked.

"You will be compelled to deliver him up," she said.

"Alive" — he hesitated — "or dead?" he said.

"You dare not harm him!" she exclaimed, her face turning white.

"Not if you listen to reason," he said.

"You dare not harm him!" she said again.

"You are mistaken; I dare do anything to obtain what I want."

"What do you want?"

"To marry you—I will marry you. If you refuse me I will——" He stopped.

"What will you do if I refuse you?" she asked in a low voice.

"I will not tell you what I will do, but you will never see your child alive again," he said.

"You would kill him?"

"He would disappear for ever," he said.

"And you think to frighten me into such a horrible union by your threats. I defy you!"

Her words angered him. His fat face became livid with passion; his coarse body shook like a jelly-fish; his fat, greasy hands were pressed tightly together; he was a disgusting object.

"You defy me—disbelieve my threat! Well, we shall see. I give you fair warning. If you decline to marry me, your son will pay the penalty."

"You are trying to frighten me.

You may not know where he is," she said.

"I do know where he is," he said.

"I don't believe you. I did a short time ago, but I do not now."

"Do you know this?" he asked, producing a scarf from his pocket.

It was Hal's. She recognised it, and a cry escaped her. He must know where her child was.

"I see you do," he went on; "I took it from him, thinking I might require it as evidence. Now do you believe me?"

"Yes," she said faintly.

Her strength was failing. She was far from strong. The strain was more than she could bear. She was alone with this big hulking brute; there was no telling what he might do. Her first intention was to open the door and call for help. If she did so, what would happen to her child?

He saw she was in a half state of collapse, and said in as soft a voice as he knew how to assume—

"I have no wish to distress you. If you will listen to reason, you shall have your son back in twenty-four hours."

"I am to sacrifice myself for my son?"

"I do not ask for any sacrifice. I ask you to marry me. I am rich; you shall have everything a woman desires," he said.

"Except honour and self-respect."

"Am I not as good as other men?" he asked angrily.

"To me you are the most repulsive thing I ever saw," she said.

"You drive me too far," he said hoarsely. "I will not stand your taunts and insults any longer. Give me your answer. I care not how you regard me: I want you, and I will have you."

"You have had my answer."

"You refuse to marry me?"

"Yes."

"Then your son will pay for his mother's obstinacy with his life," he said.

She laughed hysterically as she said in a shrill voice that echoed through the room—

"You dare not kill him! I dare you!"

Her face was flushed; she walked rapidly round the room, laughing in a curious way.

Paul Schalk stood with his back to the door—it was not locked—watching her. Was she acting?

"He is as good as dead now if you refuse me," he said. "Shall I give the signal?"

She stopped, glaring at him with wild eyes; the fever was at work again.

"What signal?" she gasped.

"This." He held up Hal's scarf; then turning round locked the door, putting the key in his pocket. He crossed over to the window.

"What are you doing there?" she asked.

"Waiting for your answer."

"You have had it."

"Shall I give the signal?" he asked.

She laughed again; it was almost a shriek.

"Be quiet," he said angrily.

"Give me the scarf," she said, holding out her hand.

He thought she was yielding, caring not what the state of her mind might be.

"You will consent if I give it you?" he asked eagerly.

She sprang upon him so quickly that he was taken at a disadvantage. She wrenched the scarf from his hand and ran for the door.

He followed her, and they raced round the room.

"I'll show you no mercy now," he panted. "I have you alone. It shall be you first, then the brat."

Mercifully she failed to understand him. As she passed the window she looked out. On the opposite side of the road she caught sight of a well-known figure.

Without hesitating she plunged her hand through the glass—the scarf saved her fingers—and waved it frantically. The man heard the crash and looked up; then he ran swiftly across the road.

"Do you know what you're doing?" gasped Schalk. "That's the signal; you're giving the signal. Are you mad?"

She turned upon him like a tigress at bay.

"What signal?" she said.

"The signal for your son's death," he said. "I can prevent it even now. Will you consent?"

She had given the signal for her child's death. The horror of it overwhelmed her. At any cost she must save him.

"Go! go!" she shouted. "Save him! save him, and you can do as you will with me."

Paul Schalk rushed to the door; as he unlocked it he heard steps on the stairs. Before he could turn the key again the door was flung open, and Grant Halstead stood facing him, his eyes blazing with wrath.

Denise saw him, and holding out her arms towards him cried—

"Save me and my child; he will kill us."

Grant Halstead seized the bulky Schalk by the throat and shook him until his teeth rattled; then he dragged him through the doorway, twisted him round, flung him forward, and he fell in a heap at the foot of the stairs.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAP

GRANT HALSTEAD picked up the unconscious Denise in his arms and carried her tenderly to the sofa. How thin and pale she was! She must have been very ill. He had only just reached Cape Town and knew nothing of the circumstances.

Hearing a groan at the bottom of the stairs, he left her and went to Schalk. From him he meant to learn what had passed between them.

"So you have saved your neck," he said. "Get up, you scoundrel." Schalk groaned again; he feared the enraged man bending over him, and thought it safer to lie still.

"Get up," said Grant, giving him a vigorous kick. "You are not hurt, that's lucky for you.

Your flesh saved you; that's one advantage of being fat."

"I'm hurt, I cannot," said Schalk. For answer Grant gave him another reminder with his foot, and Schalk struggled to his feet.

The servant, hearing the noise, came up with a frightened face.

"Go upstairs to your mistress," said Grant. "She has fainted." The woman, with a startled cry, hurried upstairs.

"Come in here," said Grant, pulling Schalk into the room by his arm. "You have a man to deal with now, not a woman, so be careful." Schalk shook with terror; he was a despicable object.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Grant. "Why did Mrs. Beckman break the glass in the window and call for help?"

"She did not call," muttered Schalk.

"Never mind that. What were you doing in her room?"

"That's my business," said Schalk.

"You'll find it is my business too," said Grant. "I have not much patience with such men as you. Now answer my question."

"I called to see her; she has been ill."

"So I saw. Go on."

"She became excited, rushed around the room, and fell against the window."

"That's not true. She pushed her hand through the glass; I saw her. She saw me; it was a call for help. Out with it."

"She is not in her right mind, she's recovering from fever. She's lost her son; it's driven her frantic."

"Think of Denise and the little chap, old fellow."

The words of his dying comrade rang again in Grant's ears as he heard him. "The little chap" was lost; it was his duty to find him. What did this man know of it? He knew Paul Schalk had wished to marry Denise before Captain Beckman won her. Had he persecuted her since his death?

Grant Halstead was in no humour to mince matters with Schalk. If there was any devilry at work this man was at the bottom of it; he began to have an inkling of what had happened. Striding up to Schalk, he said as he shook his fist in his face—

"You'll find the boy, my fat friend, or it will be the worse for you."

"How can I find him? He was stolen from Doctor Binder's buggy."

"By your orders."

"No."

"I say, by your orders. I know you and that old thief of a father of hers. Out with it, explain everything."

Paul Schalk hurriedly concocted a story to suit his ends. The idea of the scarf being a signal had suddenly occurred to him when talking with Denise; there was no danger to the boy.

Grant Halstead listened attentively.

"So you have no idea where he is?" he said.

"I did not say so."

"By the Lord, if you don't out with it I'll throttle you," said Grant fiercely.

A loud scream from the room

upstairs startled them. The servant rushed out calling for help. Grant had no wish for Schalk to escape him, so forced him to go up first.

When they entered the room Denise was standing erect, the fever burning in her eyes. She pointed at Schalk and shrieked—

"He knows where he is. I have given the signal for his death. My poor Hal. Save him, Grant, save him."

She rocked herself to and fro in a paroxysm of fear and horror.

Grant was bewildered. A signal? What signal had she given, and how?

He turned on Schalk in a fury; at that moment the half-caste's life was in danger

"What does she mean?" asked Grant savagely.

"The scarf, the scarf!" cried Denise; "it was the signal."

She waved it in the air.

Grant raised his fist.

"Tell me what she means," he said, "or I'll fell you."

"The waving of the scarf through the window was a signal that she refused to listen to my terms, but I can save him if you let me go."

"Let him go," shouted Denise. "I will consent, only let him save my child."

"Consent to what?" asked Grant.

"To marry me," grinned Schalk, as he turned towards the door.

"Stop!" thundered Grant.

Schalk turned round, and what he saw in Grant's face caused a shiver to run through his huge frame.

"She shall not sacrifice herself to a mass of corruption like you," he said fiercely.

"Perhaps you want the dainty morsel yourself," sneered Schalk.

He was unwise to taunt him. Grant seized him by the throat, squeezing his windpipe until he became almost black in the face and choked for breath.

Denise put her hand on the angry man's arm. She had recovered her senses completely, and said—

"Let him go, he can save my child."

Grant relaxed his hold, and Schalk collapsed into a chair.

"He dared to insult you?" said Grant.

"He has my child."

"What about the scarf?" said Grant.

"It was agreed between myself and a man watching, that if the scarf was waved from the window the boy was to be taken away," said Schalk.

"And you can prevent it?"

"Yes."

"Then come with me," said Grant.

"I go alone, or not at all," gasped Schalk.

"You'll go with me," was Grant's reply.

"You'll be in danger."

"I have faced a hundred Zulus single-handed," was the reply.

Schalk believed him; however much he hated him, he admired a bravery he did not possess himself.

There was no help for it, and Schalk had to give in.

"Remember your promise," he said to Denise.

Grant seemed about to spring upon him again, when she said—

"Go with him. What matters the rest, so long as my boy is saved?"

Grant vowed the promise should never be carried out; at present he must rest content and save "the little chap."

"Look to your mistress," he said to the servant, as he bundled Schalk out of the room.

When they were in the street, Grant said—

"Shall we drive?"

"No, we can walk."

"Get along then; be quick, I am in no mood for delay."

They went on, Schalk breathing heavily, perspiring copiously. Despite his condition his mind was actively at work; it was the only part of him that moved quickly. Could he lead Grant into a trap? The lad was in no danger, his ruse had so far succeeded. The cunning look on his face aroused Grant's suspicions. He had been accustomed to deal with savages; he knew the signs of treachery well. He was armed—a six-chambered revolver was in his pocket, loaded. He smiled softly as he thought of it.

Schalk walked on. They were going towards a disreputable part of the town. Grant's spirit's rose; he loved danger, a fight against odds, and he might find an excuse for putting a bullet in Schalk's fat body and settling matters that way.

They turned down a narrow street, and Grant knew they were near the bay. The scent of salt water was in the air; the rough-looking men of many nationalities had a sea-faring gait; many carried weapons and glanced at the singular pair with curious eyes.

Grant's tall athletic figure presented a strange contrast to that of the other man. He was bronzed by exposure to all kinds of weather, and was in perfect condition, as hard as nails.

Schalk stopped at a dirty, mean-looking dwelling.

"Is this the place?" asked Grant.

"Yes," said Schalk, as he rapped on the door in a peculiar way.

A black fellow opened it, and glared at them wonderingly.

"Is Dan inside?" he asked.

The black nodded.

"He's dumb," said Schalk.

"But not deaf," added Grant.

The black led the way, first locking and barring the door. They went down a dark, damp passage, and Grant heard rough voices as they proceeded.

"A nice den of thieves," he thought, but was not afraid; he scented battle and was ready for it.

The black pointed to a door.

"In there, is he?" asked Schalk.

The man nodded.

Schalk gave another peculiar knock, and a voice on the other side asked—

"What is it? Who's there?"

"Paul Schalk and a visitor," replied Schalk.

"Who is he?"

"A safe 'un," replied Schalk.

Grant put his hand in his coat-pocket and clutched his weapon.

The door was opened and Dan Tupp's face appeared.

"Come in," he growled. "More trouble about the blessed kid, I suppose."

"Traps," said Schalk, and gave

Grant a terrific kick on the shins, causing him to stumble.

Dan Tupp caught him by the collar, and three men rushed to his assistance.

Although taken unawares, Grant was not easily mastered. He struck Schalk full between the eyes, felling him like an ox. He hurled Dan Tupp against his mates, and then vaulted over the table, placing it between himself and his enemies. Drawing his revolver, he calmly sat down on a chair and pointed it at them.

"The first man moving gets a bullet in him," he said calmly.

Dan Tupp gazed at him in undisguised admiration. Desperate character that he was, he never failed to acknowledge pluck in another.

"You're a cool hand," he said. "That was a clever move of yours."

"Get up, pig"—this to Schalk.

Despite his dangerous situation, Grant laughed; even this villain regarded Schalk as a wallower in the mire, too dirty to be touched.

Schalk was stunned—the blow was severe: he remained in a semi-conscious state.

Grant had the advantage of having the four men in front of him.

"Let us talk business," he said coolly, fingering his revolver gently.

"Who are you?" asked Dan.

"Grant Halstead."

"What!" exclaimed Dan Tupp. "Halstead who took over Beckman's Horse and gave them Zulus hell?"

"That's me," said Grant, modestly.

"Then you'll come to no harm here," said Dan. "You can put up that little talker."

"No, thank you," replied Grant, "he may want to speak."

"Don't I tell you there's no one here'll harm you? There's not a man in Cape Town would harm Captain Halstead."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Grant, placidly.

Schalk having recovered, in a confused way heard what passed, and knew Dan Tupp was going over to the enemy.

"He's not Halstead," he shouted. "He's in the pay of the police. I lured him here cleverly; you'll not let him escape?"

"So that's it, is it?" said Dan. "Well, Mister Halstead, we'll try and settle matters with you."

Then Grant did an extraordinary thing; he placed himself unreservedly in this ruffian's power. Handing Dan Tupp his revolver, he said—

"Read the inscription on that. My dead comrade gave it me before we went to Zululand."

Dan was thunderstruck. He took the weapon and read the inscription on the barrel. "From Hal Beckman, of Beckman's Horse, to his chum Grant Halstead."

"It's a fake," roared Schalk. "Don't let him fool you."

"Don't grunt so loud, pig," said Dan. Then handing Grant his weapon back, he said—

"You've placed your life in my hands. I believe you; you're a brave man."

"So he is," said the others, and Schalk knew he was defeated again.

CHAPTER IX

THE TABLES TURNED

GRANT HALSTEAD'S name acted like magic on the four men; his deeds were known throughout South Africa, and far beyond. For desperate courage not even Beckman had surpassed him, and the fallen leader was succeeded by an excellent officer well qualified to rule the turbulent spirits of Beckman's troopers.

Dan Tupp and his mates looked long at Grant; they feasted their eyes upon him. He was a goodly sight. After a time Dan said—

"What did Schalk bring you here for?"

"To get the boy."

"And I'll be glad to be rid of him. He's all right, safe and sound, but he wants his mother. I'm sick of the job; it's not in my line, nabbing children; it's a woman's work, but he paid well for it."

"Who paid you?"

"Schalk."

By this time Paul Schalk was on his feet. His head ached, and there was a mist before his eyes. Grant Halstead struck hard.

"I thought as much," said Grant. "You will hand the boy over to me."

"Steady; not so fast, captain. I'll deal fair by you, and you'll deal fair by me."

"Go on; what have you to say?" asked Grant.

"There's a matter of a hundred pounds owing for his board and lodging," grinned Dan, "and I don't suppose as how Mr. Paul Schalk will feel disposed to settle up if we hand the lad over to you."

"He'll settle with you," said Grant. "I'll see to that."

"Will you?" said Schalk. "I'd like to know how you'll do it."

"You shall," replied Grant, quietly. "If you do not pay over a hundred pounds, I will hand you over to the police."

"You dare not. What would become of these men?" He pointed to Dan and the others.

"It is you I have to deal with, not them. Pay over a hundred pounds, and then I will consider what is best to be done with you."

Schalk laughed as he replied—

"Consult Dan. Hear what he has to say."

"What I say is this," said Dan. "The lad does not leave here unless the money is paid, and I do not care who pays it."

"Will you pay the money?" said Grant.

"No," replied Schalk.

"Then I will, and denounce you to the police," said Grant.

"A nice thing that would be for you," said Schalk to Dan.

"So you would drag me into the business?" said Dan.

"You don't suppose I'm going to stand alone?"

"Then let me tell you this. You're a scoundrel, for you promised my name would never be mentioned in this matter, whatever happened. You've got to pay me a hundred pounds, and if you don't take an oath not to betray me you'll not leave here alive," said Dan.

"Threatening me, are you? Mind what you are about," said Schalk nervously.

Dan smiled curiously as he said—

"I always mind what I am about, and to save trouble we may as well silence you at once. No one will miss you, or if they do they'll not bother about you. Get hold of him, boys."

It was useless for Schalk to struggle. He was seized and bound in a chair, a gag placed in his mouth, and his head forced back.

Dan Tupp took up a sharp, murderous-looking knife, and drew the flat blade across Schalk's throat. The cold steel made him shiver; his eyes stared horribly, perspiration stood in big drops on his forehead and rolled down his face.

Grant Halstead looked on amused; he was certain Dan Tupp merely wished to frighten the big coward into submission. The tables were neatly turned: Schalk had taken his place in the trap.

"How many throats has this knife cut, I wonder?" said Dan meditatively, with a sly wink at Grant. "I almost forget. There are seven notches in the haft—that accounts for seven; but there's one or two more, I am sure. Nice blade, isn't he?" he said, holding it before Schalk's eyes; "and the best of it is it's so keen on its work that there's no pain about the job. I'll give you ten minutes to decide whether you will pay the money and take the oath of silence."

During this time Dan Tupp occupied his time by whetting the knife and running his thumb along the edge. Grant Halstead saw Schalk was half-dead with terror, and rejoiced at his punishment.

"Time's up," said Dan; "take the gag out."

This was done by one of the men, and Dan said—

"Will you pay the money and take the oath?"

"Yes," said Schalk in a trembling voice.

"Have you it with you?"

"Yes."

He had placed a considerable sum in his pocket, in case he succeeded in his plot against Denise.

"Then pay it over; or better still, I'll take it out of your pocket," said Dan.

"Not more than a hundred," said Schalk.

Dan's eyes twinkled.

"So there's more than a hundred, is there? Well, you can hand over the rest as a sort of bonus for the trouble you have given us."

It was useless to protest, as he was bound and helpless. So Schalk had his pockets rifled, and then swore a desperate oath not to betray Dan Tupp or his mates in regard to the kidnapping of Hal Beckman. The nature of the oath was so terrific that even Grant was somewhat appalled at it. After this ceremony Schalk was released.

"He has me to deal with now," said Grant.

"Take the lad, and be —— to him," growled Schalk.

"Certainly I will take the boy; but that is not all: you have to pay the penalty."

"You will not inform the police if the boy is handed over to you?" asked Schalk anxiously.

"On one condition, I will not," said Grant.

"What is it?"

"You are rich. You have boasted about your wealth. You must hand over to Mrs. Beckman for her son's sole use—she would accept nothing from your hands for herself—the sum of two thousand pounds."

"Never!" gasped Schalk. "It's a robbery!"

"There is something else—you must leave this country within a week."

"I can't; I'll be ruined if I go," moaned Schalk.

"You'll be ruined if you stay; a long term of imprisonment would do that for you."

"Where am I to go?"

"Anywhere; but you must clear out of South Africa."

"You can do what you like—I'll not pay the money or leave the country."

"Then I shall go straight from here to the police and take out a warrant for your arrest," said Grant.

Paul Schalk was cornered, and had to give in; there was no other way out of it. He agreed to pay the amount named, and leave Cape Town within a week; but already he was scheming how he could be revenged on them all.

"Where's the child?" asked Grant.

"I'll fetch him," said Dan, and left the room.

"It is a good thing for you you have promised to do as I ask," said Grant.

"My time will come some day," replied Schalk.

"When it arrives I shall be ready for you," answered Grant.

Dan Tupp brought Hal into the room.

"This gentleman has come to take you back to your mother," said Dan, handing him over to Grant.

Hal clapped his hands, and clambering on to Grant's knees, put his arms round his neck.

"Have you come to take me away?" he asked. "I want to see my mother again. I have been here a long time; those wicked men carried me off."

"We have not treated you badly, have we?" said Dan.

"No, but you ought not to have taken me from the buggy. They will have been looking for me everywhere. Take me home at once, please."

Hal was looking at Schalk, and said, pointing at him—

"I've seem him before; he came to our house. He's a bad man. I hate him; mother hates him."

"I think you have hit the mark, youngster," said Grant. "He is a bad lot."

"Are you a friend of my mother's? I hope so; I like you," said Hal.

Grant stroked the child's hair as he said in a low voice—

"I am a friend of your mother's, and I knew your father. I promised him I would take care of you."

"And that's why you have come to take me away?"

"Yes."

"My father died fighting in a battle against savages," said Hal proudly.

"He did; he was a brave man, and my friend."

"I'm so glad you knew my father," said Hal. "Are you going to take care of mother too?"

Grant smiled as he replied earnestly—

"Yes, I am going to take care of your mother, if she will let me," and as he spoke he looked straight at Paul Schalk.

"That will be jolly," said Hal. "Let us go."

"What do you say?" said Grant to Dan Tupp, who was an interested spectator of the scene.

"Wait until I see if the coast's clear, then you can slip out with him," said Dan.

He left the room, and returning in a few minutes said—

"It's all right. There's no one about that's likely to ask questions."

Grant took the lad by the hand and said to Dan Tupp—

"You did a wicked thing to steal the child from his mother; it has nearly killed her. You're made for better work than this."

"I wish I'd never seen him," said Dan, pointing to Schalk. "He put me up to it. If I'd known the kid was Beckman's I'd never have done it. I'm sorry for it; I hope she'll try and forget he's ever been lost."

"I don't blame you as much as him," said Grant, looking at Schalk. "I shall never mention anything about it, unless he refuses to carry out his promise."

"He'll carry it out right enough," said Dan. "I may as well tell him his life's not safe here. He knows too much about us, and we don't trust him. Men we don't trust sometimes disappear. He'll leave Cape Town right enough; you need have no doubt about that."

Paul Schalk saw Grant Halstead and Hal leave the house, and his rage at the defeat of all his plans, and his humiliation, knew no bounds. He swore, raved, vowed to be revenged on all and sundry, until Dan Tupp said if he did not quieten down he would put a knife into him. Paul Schalk left the house later on, and went straight to David Ribot's. Here he unburdened himself, and so terrified Ribot by his threats that his accomplice was compelled to promise he would leave Cape Town with him.

"I'm not going alone, you needn't think it," said Schalk. "You're going with me. We'll sail in the same boat, David Ribot, and with our capital we can make another fortune. What do you say to London, my boy, that's the place! If we can't unload a few mining companies there, my name's not Paul Schalk."

"I'd much rather stay here," said Ribot.

"And I'd much rather you went with me for company," said Schalk. "You'll be able to take care of me."

Ribot scowled at him, but made no reply.

CHAPTER X

THE DOCTOR'S ADVICE

WHEN Grant Halstead walked into Denise Beckman's room with Hal, she came quickly forward, and with a cry of joy clasped the child in her arms. Having satisfied her longing, she held him from her, looking at him closely.

"They have not been cruel to you, dear?" she asked fondly. "They have not beaten or ill-treated you?"

"No, mother," said Hal, "but I have cried, been frightened; I did not know what they would do with me, and I was away from you."

She kissed him fondly again and again, crooning over him in a happy way. Grant looked on, well pleased at the success of his mission. He was looking after "the little chap"; his comrade would have been well satisfied.

"How can I thank you?" said Denise gratefully. "How can I ever repay you for restoring my boy?"

"It is sufficient recompense to see you happy," he replied. "I only arrived in Cape Town in the nick of time."

"Was it Paul Schalk who stole him?" she asked.

"He was the instigator, but you need not fear him again; he is leaving Cape Town."

She was surprised. What had induced Schalk to go away she could not understand.

Grant gave her an account of his adventure, and how he had forced Schalk to promise to leave South Africa. "There is more," he said. "I made him swear to hand over two thousand pounds for your son's benefit."

"I will not accept his money," she said.

"It is not for you, but for Hal," he replied.

"It will be a curse to him; we will not have his money."

Gradually Grant persuaded her to accept it, pointing out that it was a small recompense for Hal's sufferings at his hands.

"I will invest it for him until he requires it," he said. "There will be a good round sum in fifteen years' time."

"You are very good to us," she said.

Despite her illness Denise was a beautiful woman, and as Grant looked at her his heart beat fast with a sudden hope. He crushed back the feeling as he thought of Hal Beckman. Was this the way he was to think of her as he had promised—to reap the harvest his comrade had gathered? It was unworthy of him.

Dr. Binder was overjoyed at Hal's recovery; he was amazed when he found the lad safe in his mother's house.

Denise told him what Grant had done, and the Doctor hurried away to thank him.

Grant Halstead's arrival in Cape Town was the signal for doing him honour; he was fêted and made much of. He was the hero of the hour. Was he not the leader of that dashing troop of dare-devils, Beckman's Horse? Bright eyes glowed as their fair owners looked at him; but despite temptations

innumerable he kept his heart in his own keeping.

When he had a little time to spare he told Denise the story of how her husband died, modestly keeping himself as much as possible in the background: but she saw through his tale and knew what he had done. At its conclusion she said—

"In your letter you promised to tell me what my husband's last words were. Will you?"

That last scene came vividly before Grant as she spoke. Again he saw the horde of savage faces, heard the fierce yells, and the whistle of assegais in the air. Then he heard Beckman's voice delivering his last message as he fell back dying, and he said with emotion—

"He looked at me and said, 'Think of Denise and the little chap, old fellow'; then he fell back dead."

She was silent, her face buried in her hands; he saw the tears force their way through.

"He died as only a brave man dies," he said, struggling to keep his voice steady—"fighting against tremendous odds. No man could be more deeply, more sincerely mourned. All men honour him; you need not grieve for him."

She looked up through her tears, and said—

"So that was his message to you; how well you have kept your promise, by saving his son and mine!"

"Yes," said Grant, "and I will watch over you both while I live."

A glad smile came over her face as she answered—

"Then I fear nothing in the future."

Some weeks passed; Denise recovered her strength; Hal had almost forgotten the past.

One day he took her to see Kismet.

The sight of her husband's charger brought back many memories to Denise. She knew how proud he had been of the horse, and as she stroked the bay's neck she said—

"So you carried him in his last fight, old fellow; and had he been able to mount you would have saved him, I am sure of it."

Kismet rubbed his nose against her bosom, and looked at her with his big eyes.

"You are a beautiful horse," she said. "No wonder he loved you; he often wrote about you in his letters. I wish you could understand me."

"I think he does," said Grant, smiling.

"You will take great care of him, I am sure," she said.

"He is not mine, he is yours," he replied.

She shook her head.

"I have no use for him," she said. "You must keep him, indeed you must"—as he protested; "my husband would have wished it."

"It is a handsome gift," he said; "ought I to accept it?"

"Yes. Do so to please me," she said, and as she looked at him there was a light in her eyes that made his heart beat fast.

"Put me on his back," said Hal.

Grant lifted him up and placed him on Kismet's back. Hal looked round proudly.

"I feel like a soldier now. I should like to be a soldier, like my father was, and ride Kismet."

"Some day you may be a soldier," said Grant, "but Kismet will be an old horse then."

Hal patted his neck, and seemed loath to come down from his perch.

"Shall we leave you here?" asked his mother, smiling.

"No, I never want to leave you again," said Hal.

"When you are a man you will have a home of your own."

"And room in it for my mother," said the child quickly.

"That's right, Hal," said Grant. "Your mother is your best friend."

"You must live with us," said Hal. "Always. That will be jolly, won't it, mother?"

Their eyes met, but neither of them spoke.

"Wouldn't you like Grant to live with us?" asked Hal.

"Yes, dear, yes," said Denise hastily.

Kismet came in for almost as much attention as his master. His noble bearing and beautiful coat made him an object of universal admiration. His story appeared in the papers; according to contemporary accounts there had never been such a charger as the one that carried the leaders of Beckman's Horse.

Grant Halstead debated whether he should give up soldiering, or still retain the command of his troop. Fate decided for him while he wavered.

He received a letter from England announcing his father's death, and containing an earnest appeal from his mother to return home.

Grant was well-to-do now; his father died leaving a large sum of money. There was no reason why he should remain in South Africa; he could resign with honour, he had seen more than his share of hard fighting. Why did he not make arrangements to leave at once? What caused the delay? A pair of bright eyes, a bonnie face, a woman he loved, a little child, the promise to a dead comrade. He dwelt upon the last, argued that it was his duty to stand by Denise and her boy. This was make-belief to some extent. Was it duty or love, or both?

He thrashed the matter out, had a sore battle with himself; it was a kind of warfare he was unused to.

What would Beckman think if he knew his comrade thirsted for his wife with all his heart and soul? What would he think of such a false friend, who gathered all these advantages by his death, and tried to win a love that should be sacred to his memory?

No, he would not do it; he would battle down this feeling that possessed him and made turmoil in his heart.

Could he tear himself away from Denise?

Then he compromised—forced himself to believe that Denise and her boy wanted a change, that she was run down, and a sea voyage would do her good, renew her life. Eagerly he clutched at this idea, and in pursuance of it consulted Dr. Binder, who saw through the subterfuge, and with a smile encouraged him.

Mrs. Beckman would certainly be the better for a sea voyage; it would do her a world of good, and the child too, after the experiences he had gone through—it would make him forget them entirely.

So reasoned the Doctor, and the wily Grant, big innocent man in love, acquiesced in everything, and actually suggested the Doctor should place the matter before her, because he, the hero of a hundred fights, dared not do it himself. The bravest men are mere children when love attacks. Dr. Binder saw Mrs. Beckman. He came to conquer and would not accept defeat. He turned himself into a regular matchmaker; he juggled with words, never hinted at anything that might alarm her, or arouse her suspicions of his simple plot for the happiness of two good people.

"You must have a change," he said. "Mr. Halstead is going to England; it will be an excellent opportunity for you to travel by the same boat."

"But I do not want to go to England," she protested, and all the time she longed for the voyage if Grant Halstead was to be on board.

"I am your medical adviser," said Dr. Binder seriously. "I advise a sea voyage both for yourself and your son. It rests with you whether you accept it or not; it is a serious responsibility."

"And how long must I stay in England?" she asked.

He had made a breach, he poured in broad shot.

"No longer than you wish; it is the sea voyage I want you to take. I shall be very pleased to see you back looking yourself again," he said, thinking to himself—

"Let Grant get her there, that's all; we shall see what will happen."

"I will consider it," she said. "It is a serious undertaking; I cannot decide in a moment."

"I've won," thought Dr. Binder triumphantly, and hurried off to report progress to Grant.

"She'll do it, my boy, she'll do it, and you'll have to thank me for it."

"I promised him I would look after Denise and her child. You have taken a load off my shoulders, Doctor; I thank you," said Grant.

A fortnight later, Grant Halstead wrote to his mother telling her he would sail in a month's time, and that his dead comrade's wife, Mrs. Beckman, and her child, were to travel by the same boat. "I am also bringing his charger with me. Mrs. Beckman has kindly given me Kismet; he is a beautiful horse."

"A charming widow and a beautiful horse—what more could a man wish for?" was his mother's comment, as she smiled knowingly.

CHAPTER XI

PEACE AFTER WAR

THE month quickly passed and the time came for them to sail for England.

An enormous crowd witnessed the departure of the *Good Hope;* there was an eager desire on the part of the public to give the hero a great send-off.

As Denise Beckman leaned over the side of the steamer, with Hal at her side, her heart responded to the ringing cheers, and she was proud of Grant Halstead's friendship.

Kismet held a reception in his box on deck, and hundreds of people crowded round to catch a glimpse of the famous charger

The *Good Hope* cast off and started on her voyage. She made an excellent passage, and long before reaching England Denise Beckman felt new life in her and was very happy. As for Hal, he was a favourite with the passengers, made much of, as young children who behave themselves generally are on board ship.

The colour came back to her cheeks, her step was light, her figure more robust; many men thought her a very charming woman, and much attention was paid her.

During the voyage Halstead naturally had many opportunities of talking alone with her. He kept his feelings in check, bridled his passions, treated her kindly, evincing his friendship in many ways. "You look ten years younger than when we left Cape Town," he said a few days before they sighted old England. "Dr. Binder was right, a sea voyage was all you required."

"I ought to look well," she replied, smiling; "you have done everything to make the voyage a pleasure to me and Hal."

He succeeded, after much persuasion, in inducing her to go on a visit to his mother. "You will have a hearty welcome," he said, "a real old-fashioned English greeting. I am sure you will be happy."

"But your mother does not know me; I am a stranger, a colonial," she answered, smiling.

"That will make no difference," he said, "I prepared the way before we left. My mother expects you; she will be disappointed if you do not go to Silverdale. My sister is looking forward to seeing you; I hope you will be great friends."

"If she is anything like you I am sure we shall" she replied.

The customary bustle attended their arrival at the docks; the busy scene amused Hal and his mother.

Grant Halstead brought a trooper formerly in Beckman's Horse, who had acted as his servant, with him to look after Kismet.

Bob Bibury was devoted to Grant, and also to Kismet. He had been rescued from death at the hands of the Zulus when Grant, at the risk of his life, hauled him on to Kismet and galloped with him out of danger. This was a mere trifle to Grant, an incident in warfare, but it appealed more strongly to Bob Bibury, who knew he would never forget that desperate ride.

Throughout the voyage Bob attended to Kismet, seldom leaving him for long, and the horse looked fresh and well when he landed.

They travelled to Waterloo, and here Kismet was unboxed in the presence of an admiring throng of pressmen, who had heard of the doughty deeds of his master and himself.

Grant laughingly submitted to be interviewed, and Bob Bibury

gave glowing accounts of Kismet's wonderful sagacity.

"He's the best charger a soldier ever rode," said Bob enthusiastically, "and you may bet your life, if the Captain wishes it, he'll make just as good a 'chaser. I'm a Leicestershire man, and I ought to know."

Mrs. Halstead anxiously awaited Grant's arrival at Silverdale; it was many years since she had seen him. She was very proud of his exploits, her son was famous, and she made the most of the opportunity afforded for eulogising him.

Silverdale was not a large house, and old-fashioned. It stood in its own grounds, some four or five acres, well wooded, between London and Bedford, handy to town, yet in the midst of a charming country. It was more than sufficient for Mrs Halstead's requirements; at times she felt it was too large for her, but now Grant was coming home she was glad she had decided to remain and not let it, as she had at one time intended. It was the largest house near the little village of Henfield, and Martin Halstead had been a prominent man in local affairs, a generous donor to all charities and other necessities.

The home-coming of Grant Halstead was to be the occasion of much rejoicing, and the local committee had not much difficulty in abstracting a considerable sum from Mrs. Halstead and the well-to-do residents, in order to provide the requisites for a display.

The village, which lay about two miles distant from the station, was gaily decorated. Flags waved, streamers stretched across the main road from house to house. A local band had been engaged, a large tent put up in which there was to be a substantial spread, and a general holiday proclaimed in honour of the event.

Mrs. Halstead visited Henfield, and signified her approval of the villagers' exertions, merely suggesting one or two minor alterations just to show her authority.

The great day arrived. The express train was to stop to set down the illustrious party—so read a paragraph in the local news—and everybody was excited, on the tiptoe of expectation. Many of the villagers had known Grant as a boy and young man; they had read all about his exploits in Zululand, and took a personal pride in his success.

It was a lovely morning; no rain drenched the flags and banners, a light breeze fluttered them, waving a welcome.

A procession was to be organised at the station, and proceed in triumph through the village to Silverdale.

There were plenty of carriages, two from Silverdale, to carry the home party.

A shrill whistle, a puff of steam, the train pulled up, and out jumped Grant, turning to assist Denise and her boy. It was not generally known that Mrs. Beckham was to accompany him; Mrs. Halstead had, for reasons of her own, kept it to herself. There was therefore a good deal of surprise, and much surmising as to who the lady with the little boy was.

"We never heard he was—married," said one.

"She's a bonnie woman," said another.

"And there's a youngster too! Well, I never did——!"

Grant kissed his mother and sister, introduced Denise and Hal, and then turned to greet the deputation on the platform. He shook hands with every one, recalling their names and some recollections that caused many smiles.

Bob Bibury quickly got Kismet out of his box, and the horse was brought along the platform.

"You had better ride him," said Grant.

"Yes, Captain," replied Bob, coming to the salute, "but you'd look better on him," he added.

"I must go in the carriage; it has all been arranged," said Grant.

"There's a rare lot of 'em," said Bob, smiling.

The procession was quickly formed, and headed by the band marched towards the village.

Mrs. Halstead, Grant, Denise, and her son occupied the first carriage. The majority of those present thought Denise was his wife.

In the village all the school children cheered lustily. They were dressed in their best; much anxious care had been expended upon their costumes.

"How very pretty," said Denise. "What a charming village."

Mrs. Halstead was pleased. She thought Henfield a model place. She somehow associated its cleanliness and respectability with herself.

They reached Silverdale, and a tremendous cheer went up as Grant alighted and assisted the ladies out.

How nice and homely the old place looked after all these years. Here was peace after war, at any rate, and he thought with a pang of the father who was not spared to welcome him.

"We want you to come down to the marquee in the village later on" said the spokesman; "there's to be a dinner, and we've a little surprise for you. They'd like you to say a few words to them, We had no idea you were married, or we would have worded the address differently," he said.

Denise, standing by, heard him and blushed. Mrs. Halstead laughed, and Grant said with a smile—

"I am not married. This lady is Mrs. Beckman, the widow of my old comrade Captain Beckman, of Beckman's Horse. I am sure you will welcome her for her husband's sake and also her own."

The speaker apologised, and Grant acknowledged it was not a surprising mistake he had made. He promised to come to the village and bring the house-party with him at the time appointed.

"He's not married yet, but he soon will be, if I know anything about women," said the spokesman in confidence to a friend.

Denise Beckman was captured by Agnes Halstead and taken to her room.

"You must make yourself quite at home," said Agnes, "and so must Hal. We shall have some romps together, I am sure."

How fresh and sweet this English girl looked, thought Denise, and how pure. The warmth of her

welcome touched her; the tears came into her eyes.

Agnes took her hand and said—

"Grant has told us all about you—your troubles, your illness, the loss of your husband, the stealing of your boy. We will try and make you forget them all at Silverdale. I hope you will be happy here."

"May I kiss you?" said Denise simply.

Agnes smiled, and Denise kissed her cheek. How soft and velvety it was! She loved Agnes from that moment.

"No one could help being happy with you," said Denise.

"I am a very dreadful person sometimes," said Agnes. "You have no idea how cross I can be."

"I have a good idea how kind you can be," said Denise. "I cannot imagine you looking cross."

Hal laughed in childish glee as he said—

"I am sure you will never be cross with me."

"No, dear, I will not," said Agnes, lifting him up and kissing him.

She left Denise, and as she went downstairs she saw Grant in the hall.

"I have not had a proper brotherly embrace yet, Grant," she said.

"Then I will remedy the omission," he said, laughing. "Here goes," and he took her in his arms, squeezing her tight.

"Oh, you strong man," said Agnes. "I declare you have made me quite thin. Don't imagine you are wrestling with a Zulu, please."

"I am hugging the sweetest, dearest little sister in the world," he said, taking her in his arms again. "What a little mite you were when I left home, Aggy!"

"So you think I have grown. Have I improved?"

"Simply beyond all expectations. You're just lovely, as fresh as a rose, and as sweet," he said.

"Just lovely, am I?" she said archly. "Grant!"

"Yes."

"And she's just lovely, too, and my big brother thinks so—I can see it in his face," said Agnes, pointing upstairs.

CHAPTER XII

KISMET OVER FENCES

THE great day was over. The festivities were a success; everybody was satisfied, which is saying a great deal, even for such a model village as Henfield.

Mrs. Halstead declared "the thing" had been done perfectly, and asked Grant to endorse her opinion over and over again. Business soon claimed his attentions. The family lawyer would not be put off any longer. Martin Halstead's affairs must be settled at once. Grant went to London, and was boxed up in a dingy room for some hours with a responsible-looking man, whose pomposity amused him. He informed his mother that the family solicitor

was an impressive person, and almost frightened him.

When everything was settled Grant found himself in possession of a useful income, sufficient to live on and indulge in favourite amusements.

"You have done your share of work, I am sure," said his sister. "Take it easy, now you are at home."

It was all very well to tell him to take it easy, but an active man could not be contented with an idle life. It was Bob Bibury who suggested that the training and running of a few hurdle-racers and steeplechasers would fill the gaps in his time when it hung heavily on his hands. Bob, before he went to South Africa to chase Zulus, had indulged in a very different kind of sport.

In his younger days he was groom in a stable of hunters, where his skill as a rider gained him many good mounts. From here he migrated to a training stable, which he left to act as "schoolmaster" in a gentleman's private establishment in Leicestershire. Bob, however, was of a roving disposition, and a horse-dealer induced him to take a trip to Cape Town with him. Here, after a few weeks, they quarrelled and parted. Bob was stranded when he came across Captain Beckman and joined the famous Horse. Then Grant Halstead came in his way, and Bob contrived to be servant "to a real gentleman." Briefly this was his career up to his arrival at Silverdale.

Agnes was amused with Bob; he told her strange stories of wild doings in the war, in which Grant was generally the hero. The man's devotion to her brother touched her; she thought Bob a very worthy fellow indeed.

Bob Bibury's suggestion appealed to Grant, who was fond of horses, hunting, and 'chasing, but recognised that the trio was an expensive investment. Still he had money, and there was no reason, with good management, why the sport should not pay. He had no intention of racing on a big scale, half a dozen useful "timber toppers" would suit his purpose.

"We must try and buy two or three good horses to make a start with," he said.

"You have one already," said Bob.

Grant looked surprised.

"You mean Kismet?" he said.

"Yes. If he can't fence, I've never seen one that can," replied Bob.

"I never thought of him," said Grant. "Of course he can jump, I've proved it; but steeplechasing is a different game."

"It's a game he'll like," was Bob's comment.

"Then we'll try him, there can be no harm in that," said Grant.

Bob Bibury was lighter than Grant; he weighed nine stone, and when he was on a good horse there was no stopping him.

Not far from Silverdale was a small training ground, where Morgan Cullen kept a few horses, attending to them himself, with the assistance of two or three useful lads.

Cullen had of course heard of Grant Halstead, although he came into the district after he left home.

It was with feelings of pleasurable surprise he read Grant's letter asking for permission to put Kismet over his fences. "My man fancies he'll make a 'chaser," wrote Grant. "Up to now he has carried me as a charger, but there is no reason why he should not develop into a useful jumper. If you will kindly give me the necessary permission we will bring him over."

Morgan Cullen wrote back at once saying he could bring Kismet when he wished, and as often as he liked.

Last season had been rather disastrous to him, for just when he had his team fit they commenced coughing, and throughout the jumping season they were not able to run. This meant a heavy loss to such a man, as he had none too much capital. If Grant Halstead would allow him to train for him it would be a great help, and there was a prospect of it from his letter.

Kismet was taken to Parkside by Bob Bibury, Grant following the next day.

When Morgan Cullen saw the horse he was much taken with him. This Bob noticed, and was pleased with himself.

Kismet at first refused to jump the fences, but Cullen thought little of this and said—

"He must have time. Why not leave your man here with him for a few days, Mr. Halstead, and I'll give him a lead over with one of my 'schoolers'?"

To this Grant consented, and at the end of the week Bob came to Silverdale and told him Kismet took the jumps like a bird.

Grant went back with him, and when Bob rode Kismet a couple of miles over the fences he was surprised at his horse's brilliant jumping.

"He's a clinker," said Cullen. "I think there's a big race in him. I wouldn't put a National beyond him."

"The difficulty is, what am I to do with him?" said Grant. "He's such a favourite that I do not like the thought of sending him away to be trained."

"May I make a suggestion?" said Cullen anxiously.

"Certainly. I shall be glad if you can help me."

"Dare you trust him with me? Your man can remain if you wish, and my place is handy to Silverdale. You can ride over and see him any time."

"The very thing," said Grant eagerly. "Will it be any inconvenience to you?"

"On the contrary, it will help me," said Cullen. "I don't mind telling you I was hard hit last season; all my horses went wrong at the critical moment, and I lost a deal of money. Every little helps, and if you leave Kismet with me it will be a godsend."

Grant laughed. He liked Cullen's open way of speaking, and the trainer's appearance was in his favour.

"I am afraid one horse will not help you much," he said; "half a dozen might be of some assistance. You have done me a good turn by offering to let Kismet be trained here. I see no reason why you should not have my other horses when I buy them."

"If you place confidence in me, I'll do my best," said Cullen. "I

have been fairly successful with jumpers, but my luck has been out."

"Let us hope it will take a turn for the better," said Grant.

They discussed terms, which Grant thought reasonable, and it was decided that Bob Bibury should remain at Parkside to ride Kismet in his work.

"You will soon pick up a useful horse or two," said Cullen; "there's no hurry."

So Kismet was located at Parkside, and Bob remained there.

Mrs. Halstead at first did not approve of Grant "taking to the turf."

"I have heard it's a sink of iniquity," she said, "and no good will come of it. Give up the idea, Grant."

"I am not taking to the turf," remonstrated Grant. "I am merely keeping a few horses for amusement, which is a very different thing. If you had been in some of the holes I have, mother, you would not call the turf such powerful names."

"Your father would not have liked it."

Grant smiled as he replied—

"I think my father would have considered I was old enough to look after myself. Don't worry, mother; I assure you I am not going to develop into a racing man."

Agnes sided with her brother. So did Denise, and between them they won Mrs. Halstead over. She seldom opposed Grant; moreover, she loved him dearly, and was very proud of him.

Denise Beckman had been at Silverdale six weeks; the time passed pleasantly and quickly. She had never been quite so happy as she was in this English home. The life was new to her; there was a freshness about it that touched her, and every one was kind to her.

It was, however, impossible for her to remain there indefinitely. She felt she had trespassed upon their hospitality too long already, although she knew she was very welcome. She commenced to take herself seriously to task. It was not right for her to remain in the house with Grant, feeling as she did towards him. She no longer concealed from herself that she loved him, that her feelings were not merely those of friendship. It was wrong to put herself in his way, force herself upon him. She could not help loving him; he had been so kind to her and Hal, it was natural that she should be deeply grateful.

She tried hard to hide her real feelings, but there were times when she caught herself looking at him utterly oblivious that there was any one else in the room. She was sure Agnes suspected the truth; did Mrs. Halstead? If so, how would she take it? She was no fit match for Grant—at least, such was her opinion, although it was wrong. A good, true woman is a fit mate for any man.

At last she made up her mind to speak to Mrs. Halstead, to tell her this pleasant visit must come to a close, that she must return to South Africa. She did so naturally, apparently without an effort.

"But why do you wish to leave us?" said Mrs. Halstead. "We

are delighted to have you, and six weeks is not a long time."

"I must return to Cape Town," she replied.

"So soon—only six weeks in England? You have seen nothing yet; learned very little about our country."

"I have learned what the life in a lovely English home is like," replied Denise. "It has been the pleasantest experience of my life."

"We are very quiet people," said Mrs. Halstead, thinking all the better of her guest for her remark.

"And very happy."

"Yes, I think we can claim to be that; we have not many disagreements."

"You will tell Mr. Halstead?" said Denise.

"That you intend leaving us?"

"Please."

"If you wish it, but I know what he will say."

"He will think it is quite time I returned home."

"Grant will say it was not worth while coming to England for six weeks, and that the wife of his old comrade in arms is welcome to remain at Silverdale as long as she wishes," said Mrs. Halstead.

Denise thought this probable, but she said again—

"You will tell him?"

"Why not inform him yourself?" asked Mrs. Halstead.

"I had much rather you did so," replied Denise, a faint colour spreading into her cheeks.

When she left her, Mrs. Halstead smiled as she said to herself—

"She loves him—I am sure of it; and perhaps she is wise to go. I wonder if Grant admires her. If he does he conceals his feelings well."

CHAPTER XIII

WAIT TWELVE MONTHS

MRS. HALSTEAD told Grant of Denise's intention to return to South Africa. It came as a surprise. He had not thought of it. Why should she go?

The more he considered the matter, the more reluctant he was to part with her.

Would it be right for him to propose to her? That would settle the difficulty, if she consented. He was loath to put the question, thinking his dead comrade would not have been very well pleased at this way of taking care of her and "the little chap."

When he spoke to Denise about her intended departure, she was firm in her resolve to leave Silverdale.

"I cannot remain longer," she said; "I am only a guest, and it is not fair to trespass upon your mother's hospitality."

"She does not wish you to go," he replied.

His arguments were in vain. He was sorely perplexed.

It was Agnes who put the question plainly to him.

"Why don't you marry her?" she said. "I am sure you are in

love with her, and she returns your affection."

"Are you certain?" he asked eagerly.

"There's not much doubt about it," replied Agnes, smiling.

"But I ought not to marry her; it would not be right," he said.

"Why? I see no objections."

"Hal Beckman left her in my care."

"And the most satisfactory way of taking care of her is to marry her," said Agnes.

"Would it be quite fair to his memory?"

"Quite; you need have no scruples on that score."

"Agnes," said her mother shortly afterwards, "do you think Grant admires Mrs. Beckman?"

"Yes, mother."

"Does he love her?"

"Yes."

"Will he marry her?"

"I think so."

"How would you like it?"

"I do not think he could find a more suitable wife."

"She is very nice," said Mrs. Halstead. "I had no idea colonials were so ladylike."

"Did you imagine they were half savages?" laughed Agnes.

"No, don't be ridiculous; but I thought they were different from our women."

"And from your experience of Denise you find they are not?"

"There is no lady of my acquaintance I prefer to Mrs. Beckman," was Mrs. Halstead's reply.

"Then you would be satisfied if he married her?"

"Quite."

"I will tell him."

"No, do not say anything," said her mother. Let him have a free hand."

It was Grant who asked his mother's advice about proposing to Denise, and her reply removed his remaining scruples.

He took the first opportunity of putting the question to Denise. She was not surprised; her joy was great, but she refused him.

"Then you do not love me," he said "I hoped you did, I am sorry I was mistaken."

"I did not say I did not love you," she replied.

"Do you, Denise?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," she said in a low voice.

"Then why do you refuse me? It is not fair to either of us."

"I do not think I ought to marry you," she said.

"Why?"

"Because I am a stranger; and then, there is my father."

"I don't want to marry your father," he said, smiling, "I want you."

"You forget my father is, I am sorry to say——" she hesitated; after all, he was her father.

"He has not lived the best of lives," said Grant, "but that is not your fault."

"I wonder where he is? Strange he should leave Cape Town with Paul Schalk," she said.

"I rather fancy they were partners in one or two schemes," said Grant.

"Have you any idea where they went?" she asked.

"No, I never troubled to inquire," he answered.

"They may be in London."

"Possibly; but what difference does that make to us?"

"They might cause trouble—annoy you."

Grant laughed as he said, "I fancy they will keep clear of me. What made you think they might be in London?"

"I do not know, but something tells me they are."

"All the more reason why you should give me the right to protect you," he said.

Agnes talked seriously to Denise when she heard of her refusal.

"Why won't you marry him?" she said. "I am sure you love him."

"I love him so much that I will not do anything that may cause unhappiness to him or to those belonging to him," said Denise.

Agnes looked surprised; she did not understand.

"How can your marrying him cause unhappiness?" she asked.

Denise explained about her father, and Paul Schalk, but Agnes laughed at her fears.

"With Grant for your husband you have no occasion for alarm," she said.

"It is not for myself, but for him," said Denise.

Mr. Halstead came to the rescue. Grant had made up his mind to marry Denise, that was sufficient for her. She was a powerful ally to her son, pleaded his cause well, and at last Denise gave way, when Mrs. Halstead clenched her arguments by saying—

"He loves you; we all love you. I am sure you do not wish to be ungrateful; you can make us all very happy by marrying him."

Grant was exuberantly joyful. He had won; Denise was his.

She stipulated for time; he must give her twelve months. He might change his mind; if he did not she would marry him.

"What an awful time to wait," protested Grant.

"It will soon pass," she said, smiling.

"If you were as deeply in love as I am you would not wait twelve days," he said.

"It is because I love you so dearly I ask you to wait. I want you to be quite sure of yourself," she answered.

"I am sure. Denise, you are mine; nothing will alter the fact."

She submitted to his embraces, felt secure in his arms. She never doubted he loved her; still it was better to wait.

"And I must not remain here," she said. "You must have perfect freedom."

"But where can you go?" he asked.

"I will take lodgings in London, or somewhere near."

"It's ridiculous," he protested.

"Please let me have my own way in this," she pleaded.

Reluctantly he consented, but could not understand her motive for delay.

It occurred to Denise that if her father was in London she might see him, and make sure that he would not cause any unpleasantness if she married Grant. She dreaded his doing so, being aware that he was unscrupulous. He might possibly insist upon coming to Silverdale, if he was in London. She could not bear that. What would Mrs. Halstead and Agnes think of him?

Grant insisted upon accompanying her to London with Agnes.

"I must see you are comfortably settled," he said.

"Leave it to me," said his sister. "I know just the place for her."

"Where?" exclaimed Grant.

"At Staines. Mrs. Melton lives there," said Agnes.

"Who is she?"

"My old nurse. She married well, has a comfortable home; it will be the very place for Denise," said Agnes.

They journeyed to London and on to Staines, Agnes having previously written to Mrs. Melton.

The house was a roomy one, overlooking the Thames. Her husband died some ten years after they were married, leaving her comfortably off. She increased her income by taking in visitors during the river season. Mrs. Melton was delighted to do anything for Agnes, of whom she was very fond, and she at once took a liking to Mrs. Beckman. No mention was made of Denise's engagement to Grant; they thought it better not.

Grant was pleased with the house; Denise thought it charming; Hal was delighted at the prospect of boating on the Thames.

In the course of a week or two Mrs. Beckman was comfortably settled with Mrs. Melton.

Grant felt lonely at Silverdale now she was gone, so did Mrs. Halstead and Agnes.

"I have promised to go and stay with her in the spring," said Agnes.

"We shall be married as soon as the time expires," said Grant, and tried to be contented to wait.

To pass the time away Grant went frequently to Parkside. He had bought three useful horses, and Morgan Cullen was sanguine of winning some races with them during the coming season.

Kismet had progressed considerably. He was a safe, sure jumper, and also fast. Grant was pleased with his favourite. Often as he watched the horse at work he thought of the many dangerous rides he had on him in South Africa. Kismet had carried him safely through many stiff fights. That mark on his flank was caused by a thrust from an assegai. It was a near thing that time.

From Kismet his mind wandered to Hal Beckman. How vividly the death of his leader appeared even now, surrounded as he was by glorious scenery, in a beautiful English country. "Poor Hal," he thought. "He was a good fellow, the best of comrades, and how bravely he died. And I am to marry Denise. Strange how fate deals with us. I begin to think it was what he would have wished. He feared for her; he knew Paul Schalk and her father. I wonder where they are. Denise may have been right when she fancied they were in London. There's ample room for two such rogues there. They'd better not interfere with me or her. Schalk is a revengeful scoundrel; he'd not stick at a trifle, and he'll never forget how I got the better of him in Dan Tupp's den. Curious mixture, Dan. He ought to have been in our troop; he'd have made a good soldier,

and it would have kept him out of mischief. We'd a queer lot of fellows in Beckman's Horse, all sorts, and some with queer pasts, but they were beggars to fight, and no mistake."

Kismet, with Bob Bibury on his back, pulled up in front of him, interrupting his reflections. "I didn't see much of the gallop," he said; "my thoughts went wandering."

"It was a capital go," said Bob. "He's a wonder, Captain."

"As good a 'chaser as he was a charger?" asked Grant.

"Better."

"Impossible; recollect how he carried me in the war."

"Shall I ever forget it," said Bob, "or how with your help he saved my life, good old fellow?" and he patted his neck fondly.

"That was a narrow squeak, eh, Bob?"

"My eyes it was," said Bob. "I can feel that blessed assegai sticking in my thigh yet."

"Nasty things, weren't they?" said Grant, smiling.

"No pin-pricks from them," said Bob, with a grimace.

"How would you like to go through it all again?"

"Shouldn't mind it, with the same fellows," answered Bob.

"They were a curious lot," said Grant.

"But good fellows all; they never went back on a pal."

"What a brave man Captain Beckman was," said Grant, looking at Kismet.

"Aye, that he was," answered Bob. "The men followed him anywhere. He never saw danger, no more did they. I wonder if Kismet remembers him."

"I dare say he does," said Grant. "Horses have memories."

"There was a lot of Yeomanry fellows went past here the other day," said Bob, "and Kismet saw them. You should have seen him prick his ears and heard him snort. He knew they were soldiers. Yeomanry are soldiers, I believe?"

"Some of them very good men," said Grant, smiling.

"I wonder how they'd fancy a brush with the Zulus?"

"They would account for a good many of them, I'm sure," said Grant.

"Perhaps they'll get a chance some day," said Bob.

"They'll be ready for it when it comes."

"Sometimes folks think we're half asleep in England," said Bob, "but only let a foreigner try and grab a bit of our country, and I reckon he'd find us pretty wide awake."

Grant laughed as he said, "They'd not 'grab' much if there were many men like you about, Bob."

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE STRAND

WHEN Paul Schalk and David Ribot left Cape Town they journeyed to Durban, and from there to London, taking this roundabout way to put inquirers

off the scent. "It is not advisable to let people know where we are bound for," said Ribot.

Arriving in London, they established themselves as stock and share brokers, company promoters, moneylenders, under the name of Ribot and Schalk.

David Ribot was a keen financier. Schalk was of opinion his partner could easily manipulate figures to give any result he desired. He had seen some of Ribot's balance-sheets and they caused him surprise; they were decidedly clever. Juggling was not an adequate word to express Ribot's handling of large sums of money.

Having capital at their command they succeeded in obtaining a fair amount of patronage, and the "outside firm" was well known in a very short time. So far it had paid them to trade legitimately, but Schalk was of opinion they did not make money fast enough; he wanted to take risks, but David Ribot declined.

"There's time enough for that," he said. "We've got a fair thing, let us stick to it."

"I believe you're trying to run straight," said Schalk, with a sneer.

"And what if I am? I've done enough dirty work in my time, some of it for you; and now I've made a fresh start, I mean to act squarely," snapped Ribot.

Paul Schalk laughed as he said—

"You'll find it difficult; the temptation will be too strong when a big deal comes our way."

"We shall see," was Ribot's remark.

When Grant Halstead arrived in England, and the festivities at Henfield were noticed, Paul Schalk became excited. Mrs. Beckman's name was included in the list of visitors at Silverdale, with sundry remarks about her late husband's career.

He was the first to inform David Ribot of the news that his daughter was in England.

Ribot was surprised, but made no remark.

"I have an account to settle with Halstead," said Schalk, with a black look. "I have not forgotten how he treated me. He forced us to leave Cape Town, and we ought to get even with him for it."

"He forced you to leave," corrected Ribot.

"And you too."

"No; you managed that, I have you to thank for it."

"It amounts to the same thing," said Schalk. "He forced me; as a consequence I persuaded you to leave."

"If you take my advice, you'll let him alone," said Ribot, "he has more friends here than he had over there."

"If I get a chance I'll pay him out, and your daughter too; she treated me shabbily."

"You will not interfere with her," said Ribot quietly.

Schalk looked at him in surprise as he said angrily—

"I am as keen about marrying her as ever I was, and you will help me."

"Not I," said Ribot. "I have had enough of meddling in your matrimonial projects."

"Do you refuse to help me?"

"Yes."

"We are partners, you'll have to help me."

"Don't talk like a fool. What has my daughter to do with our business affairs?"

"You'll find she has a lot to do with them. I paid you money to help me to get her and I have had no satisfaction. Our compact still holds good," said Schalk.

"I tell you I will not assist you," said Ribot firmly.

"We'll see about that when the time comes," answered Schalk angrily.

Paul Schalk's money brought him acquaintances, some of them not very desirable. He was a boaster, and must have some one to talk to about himself. David Ribot, on the other hand, avoided making friends, he preferred to work alone, it was safer. He wished to be rid of Schalk; the man hung about him like a millstone, he could not shake him off.

When Ribot was in this frame of mind he was dangerous. Schalk did not know him, although they had been acquainted for years. For some time David Ribot had been concocting plans to shake Schalk off. It was difficult. Schalk knew many things not to his credit. It was questionable whether many people would believe Schalk's word against his. Ribot was the man who conducted almost all the business of the firm, and so far he had worked in a straightforward way. The change of climate and locality seemed to have acted beneficially on Ribot's morals. He found it much pleasanter to sail in safe waters; the necessity for keeping a sharp look-out, being always on his guard, vanished. By degrees his old habits dropped from him; he commenced to look men in the face, and found it pleasant. Why should he not blot out the past and live a reputable life? True, in Cape Town he had sailed pretty near the wind many times, but had never got within the clutches of the law.

David Ribot had trafficked in illicit diamond buying; he had in his possession two large stones that his experience taught him were worth some thousands of pounds. He knew where they came from, to whom they legitimately belonged, and he was troubled.

Had any man who knew him well in Cape Town been informed that David Ribot's conscience pricked him, he would have laughed the idea to scorn.

Nevertheless it was true, and David, in his desire to go straight, found himself in a dilemma. He might restore the diamonds, but that would possibly get him into trouble. If he kept them he was no better than a receiver of stolen goods. He had paid for the stones, but not within many times of their value. Fortunately, Schalk knew nothing about them.

These diamonds were a source of irritation to him; they constantly reminded him of past failings, accused him of unfair dealings. They fascinated him in much the same way as a deadly snake hypnotises its victim. When he handled them they sent a thrill through his body. They were cut and polished; a man hailing from Antwerp had done this for him, and their brilliancy dazzled him. They were safe under lock and key in his

rooms; no one knew he had them. Perhaps the best thing he could do was to let them remain there. He reasoned himself into thinking it was a sort of expiation for his offences that these diamonds should remain in his possession to remind him of what he had been. Possibly they might keep him from falling into crooked paths again.

When Paul Schalk showed his hand, and said he meant to be even with Grant Halstead, and continue his attentions to Denise, David Ribot rebelled. He said to himself there should be no more of this. If it became necessary he would warn Denise. Why should he not seek her out without letting Paul Schalk know? This he determined to do, but he had no wish to meet Grant. He might write to her at Silverdale, in which case she would show the letter to Halstead. That plan would not do.

Chance decided for him: he met Denise in the Strand, near Trafalgar Square.

She noticed a change in him. What it was she hardly knew; but it caused her to hold out her hand in friendly greeting.

"I have been wishing to see you ever since I knew you were in England," he said.

"I thought you had settled in London; something told me such was the case," she answered. "Is Paul Schalk here?"

"Yes, he is my partner."

"I am sorry for that."

"So am I," he replied, at which she was surprised.

"Why not get rid of him?" she asked.

"That is easier said than done. He's not a man one can shelve all in a moment."

"I have often thought, if it had not been for Paul Schalk you would have been a different man," she said.

He shook his head as he replied, "He made no difference, Denise." He added earnestly, "I'm trying to go straight now, indeed I am, and I want to get rid of Schalk."

"That's it," said Denise, half to herself.

He looked at her questioningly.

"I mean, when I met you I noticed a change in you. I'm so glad."

"Then you believe me?" he asked eagerly. "You believe I am trying to go straight."

"Yes, your looks confirm your words," she said.

"Then you will trust me?"

For a moment she hesitated; his past conduct towards her was anything but a safe guarantee for the future. Then she made up her mind and said—

"I ought to be able to trust my father—I will."

He thanked her, saying it was more than he deserved, but he would prove worthy of her confidence.

"I want to have a talk with you," he said. "We cannot remain here. Where do you live?"

If she gave him her address, what security had she that he would not tell Paul Schalk? She had said she would trust him, and he had told her he wished to be rid of Schalk.

"You need not tell me unless you wish," he said, noticing her hesitation.

"You will tell no one?" she said.

"Not a soul," he replied.

She gave him her address at Staines, half repenting after she had done so.

"I will come and see you," he said, putting the card in his pocket.

"When?"

"Any day that is convenient to you, the sooner the better."

"Come to-morrow."

"I will," he replied; and soon after they parted.

Next day Paul Schalk was surprised to find his partner not at the office. It was most unusual. David was seldom away from business. Something important must have happened. He sat down and waited all the morning. Still Ribot did not come.

Schalk had not the slightest belief in David's intention of going straight; to him it was ridiculous.

"The first big thing that comes in our way, he'll not care whether it's crooked or straight, so long as he can make a pile out of it," he said.

He rang the bell.

"Did Mr. Ribot leave any message for me?" he asked.

"He has not been here to-day," was the clerk's reply.

"Confound him," muttered Schalk, who hated being left in charge, knowing his own incompetency. "Perhaps he's got the hump about what I said about his daughter. He'll have to get rid of it. If I want his help in that direction he'll have to give it. I know too much about him for him to refuse. Fancy old Ribot turning over a new leaf! It's a good joke that—a capital joke. The old thief! It's too late for him to repent of his misdeeds. There's something in the wind. He may be trying to do a deal behind my back, and wants to get rid of me. Let him try it on. I'll have no funny business. It's lunch time; I'll go out and see some of the fellows. He'll turn up later on, I expect."

After luncheon Schalk returned to the office. As usual, he had taken sundry drinks, and was talkative, anxious for company. Towards five o'clock David Ribot came in. Schalk had been asleep, and felt refreshed.

"Here you are," he said. "I've waited for you all day."

"Anything particular to attend to?" asked Ribot.

"Not that I know of. There's some letters here. I've looked at 'em. They're more in your line."

"Can't understand them?" said Ribot.

"Of course I can; but it's your business, not mine, to answer the correspondence."

Schalk was irritated because Ribot did not mention what had detained him.

"He's up to some shady job, I'll bet," thought Schalk.

At last he said—

"Where have you been all day?"

"Eh?" exclaimed David, looking up from a letter he held in his hand.

"Where have you been?"

"In the country. I thought a little fresh air would do me good."

"Oh!" said Schalk. "I don't believe you."

Ribot shrugged his shoulders as much as to say it was a matter of indifference whether he did or not.

The action irritated Schalk, who said—

"You can't play the fool with me, remember that, you old thief," and banged out of the room.

David Ribot smiled quietly to himself. He did not seem in the least offended or put out.

CHAPTER XV

A GAME OF BLUFF

"THIS is a pretty place," said David, as he sat in the front room at Rays Villa.

"Rather a change from Cape Town," she said, smiling.

"I never want to see the beastly place again," growled her father.

"I should not mind it, but I prefer being here," she said.

Hal was out with Mrs. Melton; Denise thought it better he should not see his grandfather at present.

David hardly knew how to broach the subject he had principally come to talk about. In former days he had treated Denise badly in regard to Paul Schalk.

At length he ventured to say—

"I suppose you have not seen or heard anything of Schalk since you came to England?"

"No, I am thankful to say."

"He's a revengeful man, a dangerous fellow. I wish I had never had anything to do with him."

"It cannot be helped," she said. "I advise you to cut away from him as soon as you can."

"What I particularly wished to say to you concerns him," he said.

"He knows I am here?"

"In England, yes."

"But not where I live?"

"Oh, no. At least, I do not think so."

"If I thought he knew I would not remain here."

"You must be careful and avoid him," said her father. "He wishes to marry you still; he says I must help him. I have refused."

"I wish you had always done so," she said.

"So do I now. He's a bad lot, Denise, and he drinks hard, which makes him dangerous; gives him a sort of false courage. He vows he will be revenged on Halstead for thwarting and upsetting his plans about the boy. He's capable of doing anything," said her father.

Denise turned pale. Schalk might do Grant some bodily harm, treacherously; of course he dare not face him.

"I don't think he'll find you out here," said David; "he seldom goes out of town; but if he does you must let me know at once."

"Ought not Mr. Halstead to be warned?" she said.

"He can look after himself," said her father.

"But he must be put on his guard," she said.

It occurred to her that her father might write to Grant and give him a hint about Schalk; it would pave the way for a more friendly feeling between them.

"Why not write to him and warn him?" she said.

David looked surprised as he said—

"He'd think it an impertinence on my part, and take no notice of it. He probably considers me as bad as Schalk."

Denise thought this probable, but was desirous the impression should be removed.

"I am quite sure he would read your letter and accept it as a friendly hint," she said.

"If I thought so I would write," he replied.

David remained with her until three o'clock, and then went back to town, where, as we have seen, he encountered Schalk at the office.

No sooner had his partner left the room than he sat down to write to Grant Halstead. He was puzzled how to commence, what to write to create a favourable impression. He knew Halstead looked upon him as a scoundrel; would find it difficult to believe in the genuineness of his letter. He did not know that the way had been paved by Grant's engagement to Denise. It took him some time to finish, but at last he had something that satisfied him. He closed the letter, took it with him, and posted it.

Grant Halstead was much surprised at its contents; it was the tone of the letter caused him to think David Ribot must have changed for the better to write in this strain. So he had seen Denise. Grant doubted the wisdom of giving him her address. He read the letter again, and said to himself—

"Ribot has changed, there's no doubt about it. I believe he is anxious to be rid of Schalk; it ought not to be difficult. His warning is friendly, but I am not at all afraid of Paul Schalk."

Grant laughed as he pictured Schalk's predicament in Dan Tupp's den; he wondered if he were as fat and coarse as ever, as repulsive to look at. Grant guessed Denise had prompted her father to write, and her reason for doing so. He answered the letter in a friendly spirit, thanking him for his warning, assuring him he had no fear of Schalk, and cordially advising him to get rid of him.

David Ribot was delighted with the letter; it was more than he expected. He had written honestly, and this was the result; he was more than ever determined to keep straight for the future. Paul Schalk noticed the change in him and was puzzled. It was a shock to him when David Ribot declined to have anything to do with a certain concern because he considered it a bogus affair.

"What does that matter? Look at the money there is in it!" exclaimed Schalk.

"I grant there's money to be made out of it—a lot," said David; "but not honestly."

Paul Schalk laughed.

"You turned preacher!" he said. "Don't add hypocrisy to your other sins."

"I'll have nothing to do with it," said David.

"As a partner in the firm, I say you shall."

"I have as much say in the matter as yourself," said David.

"It's throwing thousands away," said Schalk.

"Go in for it yourself."

"I can't, without you."

"That's easily managed," said David.

"How?"

"Dissolve partnership."

"That's the game, is it?" said Schalk. "But you'll not get rid of me so easily."

"I will not continue to work with you unless you do as I wish."

"Have it all your own way, eh?"

David nodded. "It amounts to that."

"And I refuse to take a back seat or to dissolve partnership, and I mean to go in for this thing in the name of the firm," said Schalk.

"You cannot," said David.

"Who will prevent me?"

"I will."

The two men sat on opposite sides of the table, glaring across it. Schalk quailed under the piercing scrutiny of his partner's eyes; he was no match for David Ribot.

"Take care," roared Schalk, bringing his clenched fist down on the table.

"They will hear you in the front office," said David quietly.

"D—— them, let 'em," blustered Schalk. "What do I care?"

David took no notice of the angry man, which exasperated him still more.

"I'm going out to settle this matter with ——," he said, mentioning the firm.

"You can please yourself about that, but you will do it entirely on your own account. If you do it in the name of our firm I shall publicly repudiate it; if you do it in your name I shall also publicly state I am not interested in the deal, and am no longer your partner."

"You mean fight?" said Schalk.

"I mean business," was the reply.

"If we dissolve partnership, I'll ruin you."

"You are at liberty to try."

"You think I cannot!"

"You may, or you may not," said Ribot.

"I have money; I'll spend all I have to ruin you."

"That would be foolish. You would come down smash in the process," said Ribot quietly.

"I'll do more. I'll ruin your daughter," said Schalk.

David Ribot's hands clenched, but he kept his temper.

"And I'll have it out with Halstead," roared the angry man. "I know his game. If you're blind, I'm not. He wants to marry her; that's what he wants, or he did. Now he's rich, he'll perhaps arrange it some other way."

"Be quiet, you beast!" said Ribot sternly. "How dare you insult my daughter!"

"Oh! Oh! That's good," laughed Schalk. "You've changed your tone. A nice father you have been! You've looked after her well, haven't you? Sold her to me, and didn't complete the bargain. Much she's got to thank you for!"

David Ribot hung his head; he felt ashamed that he could not refute the words.

"That's hit home, has it?" went on Schalk. "You defend your daughter! It's a good joke.

If you are turning honest, either keep to your bargain and get her for me, or return the money you have had."

"Two thousand pounds," said Ribot.

"You recollect the amount. Cash on account."

David Ribot opened his desk, took out a cheque-book, and wrote out a cheque for two thousand pounds payable to Schalk.

"There's your money; that horrible bargain's off," said David, with a sigh of relief.

Paul Schalk was so surprised, he made no answer for some moments; then he burst out wrathfully—

"I'll not take the money. I'll not let you off your bargain; I'll make you stick to it. Do you hear? I'll not let you off."

"I hear," said David. "Take the cheque."

Schalk tore it up furiously.

"You can't fool me that way," he said.

"I can do one thing," said David.

"What?"

"Force you to dissolve partnership."

"You can't; I have you in my power."

David Ribot hesitated. Did Schalk know something of which he was not aware?

"I shall give the necessary instructions as soon as possible," said David. "You can take over the business, or I will, just as you please."

Paul Schalk was livid with rage; Ribot's coolness exasperated him. Hardly knowing what he said, he shouted—

"You defy me, do you? Well, there's a way of dealing with illicit diamond buyers——" He stopped; David Ribot had dropped into his chair in a state of collapse.

"Then Schalk knows about that," thought David, and the shock was too much for him.

Paul Schalk gloated over him. He made no attempt to assist him.

"That was a lucky shot of mine. I wonder what made me think of it? He's been at it, I'll swear; it knocked him completely over. I wonder if he's got any of the stones here; I'll tax him with it, any way; there's no harm in that."

David Ribot recovered and looked helplessly around him. His eyes fixed on Schalk: what did he know?

Slowly David recovered his faculties, and as he did so he felt safer, more sure of himself; gradually his determination came back to him to be rid of Schalk at any cost.

"So I hit the mark," said Schalk. "A nice little pile of stones you've got hidden away, I'll be bound."

David trembled, but his look was firm.

"Illicit diamond buying means a long term of imprisonment," said Schalk. "I suppose you are aware of that, my friend?"

"You are mistaken; I have never had anything to do with buying diamonds," said David.

"A likely story that," sneered Schalk. "When I mentioned that I knew all about it you were bowled over, the shock was too great; you fell into your chair in a fit. It won't wash with me; you'll have to give in, or I'll expose you."

David Ribot smiled as he said—

"Give in to a scoundrel like you, Paul Schalk? You don't know me after all these years. It is you that will have to give in. Murder is worse than diamond buying."

Paul Schalk's face assumed an ashen hue, and Ribot watched him closely.

"Murder!" gasped Schalk.

"It was the word I used," said David.

They were playing a game of bluff, and so far David Ribot had scored.

CHAPTER XVI

AT SANDOWN PARK

EARLY in the new year Kismet ran in minor steeplechases, at Nottingham and Leicester. The distance in each case was two miles, and Morgan Cullen accounted for his defeat by saying the course was not far enough.

Grant was much disappointed at his favourite's display; he had expected a very different performance. Evidently Kismet was much better on the training track than in public.

"He'll do better before long," said Cullen. "He ran very green; he will be a different horse in March, I'm sure."

Bob Bibury failed to understand Kismet's display, but did not lose faith in him, although he lost his money on him.

The week following his defeat at Leicester Kismet did an extraordinarily good gallop, giving away a lot of weight to a horse that had won three races in succession.

"On this form he ought to have won both his races in a walk," said Morgan.

It was decided to give Kismet his next chance at Sandown Park in the Tally-Ho Steeplechase, distance three miles, and Grant decided to ride him. He had joined the ranks of gentlemen riders in case he wanted a mount.

"Kismet knows me better than any one," said Grant, "and I fancy he'll do more for me."

When he arrived at this decision he came frequently to Parkside to ride him in his work, and there could be no doubt that Kismet liked his pilot.

Grant wrote to Denise, telling her he was to ride Kismet at Sandown, and asking her to go with him to see the race.

To this she readily consented.

For some time after her father's visit she had been in constant dread of meeting Schalk, but gradually this feeling wore off, and she thought very little about him.

Grant had met her father, and David was now aware of their engagement. He was glad Denise had such a protector as Grant, for he was not at all easy in his mind about Paul Schalk's intentions towards her. He and Schalk had dissolved partnership, and nothing more had been said about "illicit diamond buying" on the one side or "murder" on the other.

Schalk had allied himself with the firm of Aaron & Hardman, and joined them in promoting and successfully placing on the market the company David Ribot had objected to.

Ribot was glad to be rid of him, but did not underestimate his passion for revenge. There was a good deal of savage blood in Schalk, and it was apt to dominate him when his evil passions were roused or the drink was in him. So far, he was glad that neither Grant nor Denise had come across Schalk, but when he learned that Grant was often at race-meetings he thought it likely they would meet there, and dreaded it.

Schalk was addicted to gambling, and although he cared nothing for sport he often visited racecourses for the purpose of betting. It was, however, useless for David Ribot to attempt to interfere. If they met chance must play the game between them.

Grant travelled to Staines in company with his sister, and the following day they went to Sandown with Denise, who had not been on an English course.

Although it was March, and a keen wind blew across the Esher slopes, the sun shone brilliantly, and Denise thought it a picturesque scene.

Grant was popular in 'chasing circles, and had made many friends since his return home. Denise noticed with pride how heartily he was greeted on all sides.

Many of Grant's friends were his sister's friends, and consequently she and Denise did not lack for company when he left them to go into the paddock.

The Tally-Ho Steeplechase was the last race on the card; but Grant had a horse entered in the Selling Steeplechase which he fancied would about win, and his friend Captain Dyson had agreed to ride.

Being the Grand Military Meeting there was a larger attendance than usual, and as Grant had been attached to a cavalry regiment, retaining his position as Captain, he was qualified to ride in any race at the meeting.

Furze, with Captain Dyson up, won the Selling Race, and Grant was anxious to buy the horse in.

Bidding was brisk, and for some time he wondered who was anxious to buy the horse. He bid three hundred guineas, which was capped by an advance of fifty, and then he saw and recognised his opponent; it was Paul Schalk.

Grant had not seen him since the day in Cape Town when he paid over the money for Hal Beckman, and he noticed a change in him.

Schalk looked as bulky as ever, but older, more dissipated, and his face indicated he drank heavily.

Furze was not worth more than three hundred, but as Grant had a good win over him he bid up. Schalk, however, lasted the longer, and bought the horse for six hundred guineas.

"He's a madman," was Morgan Cullen's comment when the hammer fell. "Do you know who he is?"

"Yes. He hails from Cape Town," said Grant, "and we were not friendly there. He's bought Furze to spite me; that's about it."

"He's got a dear horse," said Cullen.

"Who do you think bought Furze?" said Grant to his sister and Denise.

"Did you let him go?" asked Agnes, surprised.

"He brought six hundred. Double what he is worth," he answered.

"Then some one has a bad bargain. Who is it?"

"Paul Schalk," he said.

Denise started, turning pale.

"You have no cause for alarm," said Grant, smiling.

"What is he doing here?" she asked.

"Probably he goes racing. I have not met him before. He has not changed for the better," he said.

Agnes knew of Schalk's persecution of Denise, and said—

"I hope he will keep out of our way."

"There he is," said Grant, pointing to Tattersall's, where Schalk's bulky figure showed plainly in the crowd.

"I'm glad there's a fence between us," said Agnes. "What an enormous man!"

Denise smiled as she said—

"You cannot wonder at me refusing *that*, can you?"

"No," laughed Agnes. "He's a mountain of flesh."

Denise watched the ungainly figure, and wondered if Schalk had seen her. Was this buying of Furze the commencement of hostilities towards Grant, or had he merely acted on the spur of the moment upon seeing him? Grant had no fear of Schalk, but she had, and dreaded what might happen when he heard of her engagement. Her father knew Schalk better than any one, and he had warned her against him.

There was not much time for considering over Schalk and his movements, for the next race was being run, and then came the Tally-Ho Steeplechase. An outsider won, and there was an eager desire to recoup losses on the final event. Grant had donned his colours, black and white halves, yellow cap, and was surrounded by a knot of friends, all anxious to know if Kismet had a chance. Some of them had seen the horse run ingloriously in the Midlands, and doubted his ability to win at Sandown; but Grant assured them he was hardly the same horse, and they would have a good run for their money if they backed him.

There were fourteen runners, and of this lot Blaze was favourite at two to one. Then came Idle Boy, Linnet, Kingston, and Songster. Ten to one was on offer against Kismet, and a couple of points more were laid when asked for. Grant's horse was considered too slow, and this was his owner's first appearance in the saddle in an important event.

Denise was very proud of Grant; he looked so well in his silk jacket and riding costume. She thought he appeared to more advantage than in uniform.

"I'm going to win, Denise," he said: "I feel I am. I know that means success."

"I'm so glad," she said, smiling. Her eyes followed him as he walked away, and Agnes said—

"He looks confident; and with him that means he will succeed."

In Tattersall's Paul Schalk was backing Blaze heavily. He had been told it was a good thing; and he did not spare his money when his information was good.

He was glad he had bought Furze, because he saw Grant wanted to keep him. While the Selling Race was run he caught sight of Grant and Denise standing together, and it exasperated him. This influenced him at the ringside when Furze was sold. He wondered where Denise lived; he must try and discover; it ought not to be difficult. His greedy eyes noted her movements. She attracted him more than ever. She was, he thought, better looking, more robust than when he last met her. There was no chance of speaking to her with Grant Halstead on guard; he must bide his time for that. He vowed it should not be long.

His attention was diverted from her by the solicitations of a man he sometimes employed to obtain information, who told him Blaze was sure to win the Tally-Ho Steeplechase. Schalk always liked to have a reason for backing a horse, and he got what he considered an excellent one. There would, if Blaze won, be the double satisfaction of backing the winner and seeing Grant Halstead defeated.

Paul Schalk hardly knew how much he hated Grant until he saw him bidding for Furze. The sight of his face revived bitter recollections of his ignominious defeat and of the indignities heaped upon him at Dan Tupp's; also of the making over of two thousand pounds to the child he had been obliged to restore, and the rescue of Denise Beckman from his clutches. He would have bid up to a thousand pounds for Furze had it been necessary.

Looking towards the course, he saw a black and white jacket and yellow cap going past, and recognised Grant Halstead.

He swore, and hoped Grant would break his neck or come to grief somehow.

"He's thwarted me in every way," muttered Schalk. "But for him Denise would be mine, and I should not have had to leave Cape Town. I'll pay him out yet, and her too, and that old sneak her father."

"Five to two Blaze!" shouted a bookmaker.

"Two-fifty to a hundred," said Schalk, and became absorbed in the business in hand again.

CHAPTER XVII

KISMET SCORES

KISMET got well away, but acting on Cullen's advice Grant steadied him and held sixth place on the rails. Idle Boy went away with the lead, quickly placing a wide gap between himself and the field. At the head of the others came Kingston and Linnet; the favourite, Blaze, racing alongside Grant's mount. At each fence Denise

gave a gasp, and Agnes said, smiling—

"Don't be alarmed; Grant will not come off."

"But Kismet might fall," she said. "If anything happened I should feel responsible; you see, I gave him the horse."

"And a handsome gift it was," said Agnes. "Look how well he is going."

Kismet was striding along in his best form, and Grant felt confident. Idle Boy set a fast pace, and when they had gone a mile a couple of horses were riderless, and there was a long tail.

So well was Idle Boy going that the riders of Linnet and Kingston thought it time to put on a spurt, which had the effect of putting Kingston out of the race, as he fell at the next fence.

Kismet fenced splendidly, and at one stiff obstacle made an extraordinary jump. He took off too soon, but cleared it with a bound, landing well on the far side.

Paul Schalk saw it, and his face grew black; although not a good judge, he could not fail to see the horse was going splendidly.

"Your brother is riding a fine race," said Captain Dyson, who stood next to Agnes.

Denise gave him a grateful look, and Agnes said, "I am glad you think so; you ride so well yourself."

Cecil Dyson laughed as he replied—

"I had a very easy mount on Furze. I think any one could have won on him."

"Is Furze a good horse?" asked Agnes.

"Yes."

"I am sorry Grant let him go."

"Six hundred is a lot of money," said Cecil. "Perhaps he will get him back again before long. Do you know who bought him?"

"A man named Schalk?" said Agnes.

"That's the fellow. I've reason to know him. I was fool enough to place some money to invest with Ribot and Schalk; they are shady customers."

Agnes looked at Denise, but she had not heard the remark.

The race was growing interesting. A mile from home Idle Boy shot his bolt, and Linnet went to the front, followed by Songster and Blaze, with Kismet still lying sixth.

"I wish Grant would hurry up," said Agnes.

"There's plenty of time yet," said Cecil. "He'll come with a rush presently."

Denise felt the excitement of the race; she was not accustomed to it—and then Grant was riding. She watched the black and white jacket, fascinated, and hoped Kismet would win the day, but he seemed a long way behind. Would he get up to the leaders in time?

Grant was evidently of the same mind, for at this moment he commenced to move forward on the horse.

Blaze was alongside Songster, both going well, and already the favourite appeared to have a mortgage on the race.

Schalk was jubilant: he would have the satisfaction of drawing more money than would pay for Furze, and see Grant defeated. The majority of those present were

satisfied the favourite would win and increase the balance in their favour.

Grant's friends, however, and they were numerous, had not lost heart. Blaze might be going well, so was Kismet, and the long strides of Grant's horse were beginning to tell as they came round the bend and commenced to breast the hill. Blaze was a dozen lengths to the good; already his victory was proclaimed.

"I'm so sorry," said Agnes to Denise.

"So am I. Has he no chance?" she answered.

"An excellent chance," said Captain Dyson. "I know Blaze, I have ridden him; he'll tire at the finish. He does not like this hill, that is why so much use has been made of him to get him well in front."

"But just look where Kismet is," said Agnes; "it's hopeless."

"Wait a bit," replied Captain Dyson, smiling. "He's creeping up gradually, and if Blaze falls back there will be a change in a few strides."

As he spoke the rider of the favourite seemed uneasy, and Blaze swerved. There was another fence, and all eyes were fixed upon this spot Songster got over, but Blaze blundered badly, and his rider only remained in his seat through good riding.

"Cleverly done," muttered Dyson.

"Look, look!" exclaimed Denise excitedly. "He's coming; he'll catch them, Agnes, I'm sure he will."

Captain Dyson smiled at her enthusiasm, thinking what a good-looking woman she was, but not so much to his liking as her companion, Agnes Halstead.

"I think you are right," he said. "Kismet is going in great style."

"You fancy he'll win?" asked Agnes, all of a flutter, catching his arm in her eagerness. Her touch thrilled him as he replied—

"I am almost sure he will. Blaze is beaten, and I do not think Songster is good enough."

Agnes gave him a grateful look, and noticing her hand on his arm, quickly removed it, at which the Captain smiled.

Still Blaze struggled on and caught Songster again. At this there was a shout which proclaimed the favourite would win.

Paul Schalk laughed to himself as he muttered—

"Blaze win? I should rather think so. He's lengths ahead; they'll never catch him." His heart had been in his mouth when the favourite blundered at the last fence, but the peril was past, and he was jubilant again.

Grant Halstead put Kismet at the fence, the horse clearing it at a bound. So beautifully did he jump that there was a hearty cheer. He was confident now. Kismet was going as well as at any part of the race, and the rise in the ground suited him. His action was perfect; he moved like a piece of machinery, and Grant sat still enjoying the motion. He was as cool as though he was riding an exercise gallop. Kismet seemed to acquire courage from his rider's confidence, and actually tossed his head in the exuberance of his spirits.

"He's thrown his head up, he's beaten," said Schalk.

"Beaten, you call it? That's his playfulness," said Bob Bibury, who had no idea who the big man was.

Bob had ventured into Tattersall's on the strength of Kismet winning, and had invested three pounds on him at twelve to one.

"You're a fool," said Schalk angrily.

"There's bigger ones than me around," replied Bob. "He'll win easily."

"Blaze?" said Schalk.

"No, Kismet. Hurrah!" yelled Bob, as the black and white jacket was seen overhauling the scarlet on the favourite at every stride.

Schalk felt inclined to strike him, as Bob, with a grimace, disappeared in the crowd.

Kismet was catching Blaze and Songster at every stride. So far Grant had not moved on him, but he shook him up now and the horse responded.

"What a pace he goes at!" exclaimed Captain Dyson.

"He's winning," said Denise.

"Well done, Grant. Go on! go on!" cried Agnes.

The shouts increased. Backers of the favourite were cheering on Blaze, hoping he would scramble past the post first. The horse was "dead beat," any one could see it, but still Kismet had a lot of ground to make up; his backers thought Grant kept him back too long.

Morgan Cullen had a self-satisfied smile on his face. His judgment and knowledge of Kismet told him the race was as good as over. Bob Bibury came across him and said—

"We'll win right enough now."

"Certain," responded Cullen. "He's ridden a grand race; just put on a spurt in time."

Kismet caught Songster, passed him, and tackled the struggling Blaze.

The hard-pressed favourite held on gallantly; but three miles was beyond his tether, and the hill finished him. For a few strides he kept his place, then fell back beaten, and Kismet going well within himself, finishing almost as strong as he started, won easily by four lengths. It was a grand victory, thoroughly deserved, for Grant rode a fine race, and the horse did his best.

There was some cheering as he rode the winner in, but of course the victory of the favourite would have been more popular. Blaze limped as he crossed the paddock, and seemed to have broken down.

Grant was heartily congratulated by his friends. Denise and Agnes were very proud of his success.

Bob Bibury almost embraced Kismet in his excitement, and Morgan Cullen laughingly told him not to smother the horse.

Grant and his sister journeyed to Staines with Denise, remaining the night, and the following morning he left for Silverdale, leaving Agnes behind for a few days.

He found, when he rode to Parkside, that Kismet was none the worse for his efforts, and Morgan Cullen said he would win his race at Derby Hunt Meeting the following week.

"I'm sorry we lost Furze," said Grant.

"He's a useful horse, but not

worth buying in at that price," said Cullen.

Grant wondered what Schalk would do with the horse, for so far he had not had any animals in training.

Paul Schalk was puzzled as to where he should send his purchase to from Sandown, but after some consideration decided to ask a trainer named Frank Dell to take him.

At first Dell declined, saying he had as many horses as he required. He knew nothing of Schalk, and had no desire to train for any one who might possibly cause trouble in the stable. He did not like the look of Schalk, and it is probable Furze would have gone elsewhere, had not Mr. Hardman, one of Schalk's partners, come up at the time and spoken to Dell. Lewis Hardman had three or four horses with Dell, and was rather pleased Schalk had bought Furze.

"Of course, if you recommend me to take the horse, I will," said Dell. "Mr. Schalk will understand I have to be very careful."

"That's all right," said Schalk. "Of course you did not know me. I ought to have mentioned I was well known to Mr. Hardman."

Schalk had joined the firm of Aaron & Hardman, one of the conditions being that his name did not appear, but he had no intention of remaining a sleeping partner, as they quickly found out.

Lewis Hardman distrusted Schalk, but he and his partner found his money useful at a time when their financial position was none too secure. The new venture, into which Schalk had persuaded David Ribot to enter in vain, had brought in a large sum of money to Aaron, Hardman & Co, and Schalk had stuck out for the lion's share.

This did not suit Aaron or Hardman, but the latter said, "We'd better give way this time. Leave him to me, Ben. I'll see if I can't relieve him of some of his cash."

"He'll be in good hands," said Aaron, smiling. "Fleece him, Lewis, fleece him."

It was with the intention of following out Aaron's recommendation that Lewis Hardman had asked Frank Dell to take Furze into his stable.

CHAPTER XVIII

DIAMOND BUYING

KISMET followed up his success at Sandown Park by a win at Derby.

At this meeting Furze ran in a selling race. He was so easily beaten that Paul Schalk let him go, and was surprised to find that Grant Halstead had bought him.

Schalk's venture in this race proved disastrous, and he lost a lot of money over Furze. Lewis Hardman condoled with him, and said he would soon get his losses back when he bought a few reliable horses. The truth of the matter was that Hardman had brought about the defeat of Furze in a way he was not unaccustomed to: he

had "got at" the jockey. Schalk knew nothing of this, or that Hardman profited by his defeat. He had no intention of giving up the game; on the contrary, he meant to buy a couple of horses and make a dead set at Grant.

"I'll bowl him over when I get a chance," he said angrily.

"You seem to dislike Halstead," said Hardman.

"I hate the fellow," growled Schalk. "He has stood in my way more than once, and served me a nasty trick at Cape Town."

It was with this intention Paul Schalk entrusted Hardman to purchase him a couple of flat-racers, for he heard Grant Halstead had some in training at Parkside.

As the time approached for his marriage with Denise, Grant no longer kept it a secret, and an announcement of the engagement appeared in the Press.

Paul Schalk was in a terrible rage when he read it, and vowed the marriage should not take place. This was all very well, but how was he to prevent it? He wished now he had not quarrelled with David Ribot; he might have been persuaded to help him. Was there any chance of making it up with him? He determined to try.

Ribot was much surprised when Schalk called at his office, but guessed the reason for his coming. Schalk commenced by saying he had been a fool to dissolve partnership, and that he was dissatisfied with his present position.

"I'm sorry for that," said Ribot. "but it was your own fault. You forced me into it."

"We can be friends all the same," said Schalk.

After some further conversation Schalk asked him what he thought of his daughter's engagement to Grant Halstead.

"I think it is a good match for her," he said, "but I had nothing to do with it."

"If she married me she would be a lot better off," said Schalk.

"It cannot be helped," answered David. "Had you stuck to me things might have been different."

"Why not help me now?"

David Ribot shook his head as he replied—

"It is impossible; she would not hear of it."

"Why not?"

"She is not likely to break off her engagement in order to marry you, after the way you have treated her."

"It was with your sanction," said Schalk.

"That is past and done with; I cannot interfere again."

"You refuse to help me?"

"Most decidedly. She has chosen for herself, and I do not think she has done badly."

"Then you approve of it?"

"Yes."

Paul Schalk saw further argument was useless, but with an effort kept his temper, thinking it would be best to let Ribot think he had abandoned all hope of carrying out his purpose.

He changed the subject, but his behaviour did not satisfy Ribot that he had given up his plans.

When he left David thought—"He'll make trouble if he can, both for me and for her."

The diamonds he brought from Cape Town had been disposed of for a large sum; he had to get rid

of them, and having done so said he would never engage in such transactions again. The sale had been carried out in Antwerp, and David Ribot had conducted it personally in order to avoid danger. The risk was past, he thought, and nothing more would be heard of it.

Unfortunately for David, the man he sold the stones to was a friend of Ben Aaron's. Aaron was a bachelor, but, cute man as he was, he had fallen into the clutches of a woman cleverer than himself. Rhoda Simonson was about thirty-five years of age. She was born in Vienna; her father was a Hungarian, her mother being an English governess in a wealthy family in that city at the time of her marriage.

At an early age she ran away with an opera singer who was attracted by her showy beauty, and went on the stage. She had a poor voice, but was a clever actress. She soon tired of her lover, and leaving him, came to London, where she appeared in several burlesques. Her dancing created a furore, and for a time she was all the rage. She was avaricious, accepted costly presents from her numerous admirers; at the same time kept them at a distance, which only increased the ardour with which they pursued her. For some years she had been living a life of ease and luxury in a house at Richmond. It was Ben Aaron who induced her to leave the stage and established her there. He spent large sums of money on her. She infatuated him, and he tried hard to persuade her to marry him. This she refused to do, but would not let go her hold upon him.

Ben Aaron was not an attractive man, which made him exceedingly jealous of her charms. He knew the only hold he had over her was his money. She was passionately fond of jewellery, and to gratify her in this direction he spent large sums.

By degrees his influence began to wane; he feared she had some other admirers. He determined to outbid them all for her favour by purchasing a costly diamond for her. She had often expressed a wish to possess a stone of great value, saying she would prefer it to anything in the world.

"If I buy you the best diamond I can afford, will you stick to me?" said Aaron—he was not particular how he talked to her or any one.

"I think I have been your friend for a long time," she said.

"You want a change," he said angrily, "after all I have done for you?"

"I hate men," she said.

"Except for what you can get out of them," he added.

"I acknowledge you have been generous, but not more so than I deserve."

"Will you marry me if I buy you a diamond worth several thousands of pounds?"

She hesitated; she had no wish to tie herself to him.

"I will not promise," she said. "I do not believe you will buy me such a gem."

"But if I do?"

"Buy it first, and we will talk afterwards."

He was angry, but knew that to

satisfy her he must do it and take the risk.

"I will get you what you have desired so long," he said, "but it will take time."

He went to Antwerp and saw his friend Herman Jacques, a dealer in precious stones, a famous diamond cutter. He had bought stones from him several times, and had invested money in stocks for his friend. They understood each other, and transactions between them were straightforward, although their dealings with others could not be called by that name.

Ben Aaron was a native of Antwerp. He loved the city, and would have liked to live there. It was his ambition to marry Rhoda Simonson and make his home there. This he had many times told her, and she laughed at him; but the suggestion was not altogether displeasing to her, and of late, as she grew older and thought of her waning beauty, she tried to reconcile herself to the idea.

Ben Aaron told Jacques exactly what he required—a large, exquisite diamond at as low a price as possible.

Herman Jacques had purchased David Ribot's diamonds about a month before Ben Aaron came to Antwerp, and still had them in his possession.

"I have the very stone you require," said Jacques, "but it is expensive. It is beautiful, a marvel, perfect. I have never seen a better stone."

"Show it me," said Aaron.

Herman Jacques unlocked a large iron-bound safe, and took out a red case which he placed before him. "Open it," he said. "Place it in the light; it will dazzle you."

Ben Aaron did so, and as the brilliant gem shone and scintillated in the light it well-nigh blinded him. It was a wonderful stone, his eyes feasted upon it. David Ribot would hardly have recognised it since it had passed through Herman Jacques' skilful hands.

"That would tempt any woman," said Jacques; and Aaron acknowledged the truth of his remark.

"You want it for the Simonson?" said Jacques.

"Yes," answered Aaron shamefacedly.

"My friend, you are a fool," said Jacques, who could not understand how such a clever business man as Aaron could squander money on any woman.

Ben Aaron was not offended.

"Perhaps I am," he answered. "What is the price?"

"I have another," said Jacques, and handed David Ribot's second diamond to him.

"They are marvellous," said Aaron, in raptures at the sight.

"Buy the two," said Jacques, who never neglected business opportunities, even when his friend Aaron was concerned.

"The price?" asked Aaron.

"Five thousand pounds for the pair," said Herman.

Ben Aaron caught his breath: it was a large sum, but he knew the stones were well worth the money.

"And for one?" he asked.

"Three thousand, if you have your pick."

"And if you pick?"

"Five hundred less."

"Then one is much more valuable than the other?"

"So I think."

"Five thousand is a large sum."

"They are large diamonds," said Jacques. "Look at their lustre; did you ever see such stones?"

"Where did they come from?" asked Ben.

"From South Africa."

Ben Aaron knew Herman Jacques must have bought them cheap, or he would not have offered them at the price. He became interested; a diamond with a mystery attached to it would be enhanced in value in Rhoda Simonson's eyes. She was curious as to the history of her jewels.

"Strange I never saw any account of the sale to you," he said.

Herman Jacques smiled cunningly as he said—

"It was a private transaction."

"Oh!"

"You like the stones?"

"They are beautiful."

"Not dear at five thousand?"

"No. Do you wish to get rid of them?"

"I will sell them to you."

"Any risk to me in buying?" said Aaron.

Herman Jacques held up his hands "I would not endanger a friend," he said.

"Who sold them to you?"

"I must not tell."

"Then I cannot buy."

"It is no matter, they will keep," said Jacques.

"Tell me who sold them to you, and I will buy them," said Aaron.

Herman Jacques considered. After all David Ribot had nothing to fear, nor had he; it was a long time since the stones came into his possession at Cape Town.

"You will keep it a secret?"

"If you wish," said Aaron, who had no intention of doing so if it suited his purpose, and of which Jacques was aware; but it eased his conscience to extract a promise, and there was no risk.

"And you can say you gave me eight thousand for the stones," said Jacques.

"I can do that; it will be good for both of us."

"The man who sold them to me is David Ribot, a stockbroker of London," said Jacques.

Ben Aaron was more than astonished; he was amazed.

"David Ribot! That was Paul Schalk's late partner. How did he come by the stones?"

"You know him?" asked Jacques, noticing his astounding look.

"Oh, yes; one of our partners was with him before he joined us."

"That is a curious coincidence," said Jacques.

"It is."

"You will keep the name secret?" said Jacques.

"I will buy the diamonds," said Aaron, ignoring his question.

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CHAPTER XIX

DAVID RIBOT'S MOVEMENTS

"WHAT do you think of these?" asked Ben Aaron, as he placed the jewel-cases open on the table in his office before Paul Schalk.

"They're beauties," said Schalk. "They must have cost a pile of money."

"A good investment," said Aaron, who had no intention of letting Paul into the secrets of his particular weakness.

Hardman knew about Rhoda Simonson, but not Schalk.

"Diamonds are not likely to decrease in value," said Schalk.

"Not such stones as these."

"You bought them 'right,' I expect?"

"Trust me for that. You'd be surprised if you knew who sold them to my friend, Herman Jacques, of Antwerp; he's a clever fellow is Herman, very clever."

Schalk had been thinking a good deal about David Ribot and his daughter; his name was uppermost in his mind. It suddenly occurred to him that Ribot had sold the stones to Jacques; that was no doubt the reason of Aaron's remark.

"Do I know the man who sold them to him?" he asked, in as off-hand a manner as possible.

Ben Aaron nodded an affirmative.

"There's only one man I know who is likely to have had such stones in his possession."

"Who is that?" asked Aaron.

"David Ribot."

"I should not have thought Ribot was a buyer of diamonds."

"In Cape Town he had that reputation."

"How did he buy them?" asked Aaron.

Paul Schalk thought it better to leave Aaron in the dark, so he said—

"In the usual way of business, I expect."

"There was a good deal of illicit diamond buying at Cape Town a year or two back," said Aaron.

"Was there? I never heard of it."

"What does Ben want with valuable diamonds?" Schalk asked Hardman.

"He invests his spare cash that way," was the answer.

"Then he must have plenty of money."

"He has," said Hardman, who shortly afterwards asked Aaron to let him see them, and when he learned their destination called his partner many unparliamentary names.

Paul Schalk was jubilant; he saw his way now to frightening David Ribot into acquiescing in his plans.

"When he accused me of murder he was bluffing," said Paul to himself. "No man can tax me with such a crime."

He sent a messenger to Ribot, asking him to appoint a time for an interview, after office hours.

"What's in the wind?" thought David. At first he was inclined to refuse, but thought better of it, and wrote an answer fixing seven o'clock that night.

Punctually to time Paul Schalk arrived, and David Ribot let him in.

"There's no one here except yourself?" he asked.

"No."

They passed into Ribot's room.

"What have you come for?" asked David.

"To make a final appeal to you to help me to get Denise."

"Then you are here on a useless errand."

"I think not."

His confident tone caused David Ribot some alarm, but he did not show it.

"Do you know Herman Jacques, of Antwerp?" was the unexpected question

David Ribot clutched the arms of his chair; he wondered how much Schalk knew.

"He's a dealer in precious stones," went on Schalk, watching him with a malicious smile on his face.

Still Ribot made no answer; his eyes were fixed on a long, heavy paper-weight, a curiosity from Zululand, formidable-looking, something in the shape of the head of an assegai. Schalk failed to notice his abstraction, he was too intent on his purpose; he meant playing with his victim, enjoying the sensation.

"He bought two fine diamonds the other day; I have seen them, they are Cape stones. You don't happen to have sold any lately, do you?"

"No," said Ribot.

"That's strange. Jacques said he bought them from you."

"Did he tell you so?" asked Ribot, his eyes gleaming angrily.

"No, but it's true; the man who bought them from him told me," said Schalk.

"What has this to do with me?"

"I'm coming to that," said Schalk. "In Cape Town you were under suspicion of being an illicit diamond buyer; mind, I don't say you did such things, but the police had their eyes on you. You may remember there was a great fuss about a couple of large stones being stolen from——": he mentioned the mine. "I should not be surprised if the stones I saw are the identical diamonds. If they can be traced, the man who bought them would find himself in a very tight corner."

"Well?" said Ribot, his eyes still fixed on the paper-weight with a fascinated gaze.

Paul Schalk lost his patience; he was tired of this, it was child's play.

"You sold these diamonds to Herman Jacques," he said. "You need not deny it, and they are the same stones there was such a row over at the Cape."

Still David Ribot made no answer; he was thinking a way out of the trap.

"I can lay my hands on the diamonds and the man who bought them from Herman Jacques at any time I wish. There's a dead certain case against you, and a prospect of from seven to ten years' penal servitude, if I like to set things in motion."

"And supposing I sold two diamonds to Herman Jacques. That proves nothing," said David.

Schalk laughed as he replied: "It will prove more than you

think; but I'll keep silent on one condition."

Ribot felt he was in danger and became desperate; it was hard upon him that he should be in Schalk's power when he had decided to run a straight course.

"Name your condition."

"If Denise consents to marry me, I will be silent."

"And if she refuses?"

"I will bring you to justice."

"For what?"

"Illicit diamond buying."

"I cannot help you!"

"You can persuade Denise to marry me."

"How?"

"By proving to her you are in my power."

"And I must sacrifice her happiness to secure my safety?"

"She'll be happy enough with me," said Schalk.

"With you she would be dragged down, degraded, lose her self-respect, find life not worth living," said Ribot.

"Stop that," said Schalk angrily

"I will not do it," said Ribot. "You can do your worst."

"Then I'll have you arrested before many hours are past," said Schalk, rising from his chair. "I ask you again, will you help me?"

"Help a scoundrel to take my daughter from a man like Grant Halstead? No, a thousand times no. Leave my office, you——"

Paul Schalk turned on him furiously, clenched his first, aiming a blow at Ribot's face which he avoided by springing backwards. The force of his aim caused Schalk to fall across the table. Before he could recover himself David picked up the heavy paper-weight and struck him a violent blow on the back of the head. There was a nasty crack, and blood commenced to flow from the wound. David Ribot looked on dazed. What had he done? Had he killed him?

For some minutes he watched the prostrate man. Schalk lay across the desk quite still.

Stepping nearer, David Ribot touched Schalk's head, felt his body, pushed him; still he remained insensible.

It was a relief to David when he found Paul Schalk still breathed. He dragged him off the desk, letting the huge body fall on the floor with a thud, face upwards.

"You deserve all you have got," muttered David.

Then he thought of what Paul Schalk had said, and the consequences.

It was evident Schalk had come into possession of some damning facts against him. With another man the selling of these diamonds might not have aroused much suspicion, but David knew well enough that his name connected with the transaction would be a different matter.

Schalk would do all in his power to carry out his threats and hand him over to the police; after this attack he would show no mercy, make no terms.

David Ribot always had a considerable sum of money handy in his office. This he took out of the safe, placing the notes and gold in his pocket. Hastily glancing at his book, he estimated his bank balance, sat down, wrote out a

cheque for almost the full amount in favour of Denise, directed an envelope and stamped it; these he also placed in his pocket.

Bending down over Schalk, he was relieved to hear him breathing heavily; in a short time he would recover.

He was about to leave the room when his eye fell on the paper-weigh; taking it up, he slipped it in the inner pocket of his coat. Then he went quickly out, closing the door behind him.

Passing into the street, he saw there were very few people about. No one appeared to notice him as he pulled the door to; it was not an uncommon thing for men to remain in their offices after the clerks had gone.

His actions were deliberate; he showed no hurry, but walked on in the direction of Cheapside, then through St. Paul's Churchyard, down Ludgate Hill, turning round towards Blackfriars Bridge, which he crossed.

On the Surrey side he entered a small temperance hotel and asked for a room. He was shown in, and when pen and ink were brought he took a sheet of paper from his pocket-book and wrote in pencil—

"Dear Denise,—I am going away. It is necessary. I enclose a cheque. It is your marriage portion. I always intended to hand it you when you married Grant Halstead. Cash it at once. You may never see me again. Try and think kindly of your father, and beware of Paul Schalk. Write to Halstead at once and tell him everything; he will advise you. Do not delay."

He enclosed the cheque, sealed the letter, then went out and posted it.

Returning, he had a chop and a cup of tea, after which he again went out.

He roamed about the streets until eleven o'clock. A strange feeling possessed him to go back to his office to see what had become of Paul Schalk.

Cautiously he went along the street; there was no one about. He had the key of the outer door, and opened it. He wanted no light, easily finding his way to his room in the dim light. Pushing open the door, he looked in. Paul Schalk was not there, and he gave a sigh of relief. Drawing the blind and closing the shutters, he lit the gas. There were blood-stains on the desk and carpet. He went to the lavatory, obtained soap, water, and a towel, and rubbed them carefully out. The towel he put in his pocket. He still had the paper-weight there. Sitting down, he wrote a brief note to his manager, asking him to pay all wages and close the office. He gave no reason, but enclosed sufficient money to pay what was due, and for another week in lieu of notice.

"He'll be surprised," he thought, "but he'll get over it. I shouldn't wonder if he decided to run the business. He's got a little money and plenty of brains. If he does I wish him luck."

Leaving the letter on the manager's desk, he left the place and went to his dingy lodging.

CHAPTER XX

ONE TOO MANY FOR SCHALK

DENISE was surprised at her father's brief note, also at the amount of the cheque, close upon ten thousand pounds. She read the pencilled scrawl several times, but failed to understand what he meant by "going away." Was it merely an absence of a few weeks, or longer?

Following his advice, she wrote to Grant, enclosing the note. He too was puzzled, but grasped the situation more fully than Denise.

"This is Paul Schalk's work," he said to himself. "There is danger to Denise. The best way will be to marry her at once, then she will be safe."

He told his mother of his fears and intention, and she agreed with him it would be the best plan to see Denise at once.

The same evening he was at Rays Villa. When she showed him the cheque he was amazed.

"It is a large sum," he said. "He must have urgent reasons for handing it to you."

"Do you think he has left London?" she asked.

"Probably. He may have returned to Cape Town."

"Schalk has had a hand in this," she said.

"So I think; he is a dangerous man. Denise, we must be married without further delay. It is necessary. Once you are my wife, residing at Silverdale, I can protect you."

At first she refused, but eventually gave way to his entreaties.

"Say next week, at Henfield," he said. "We can have a quiet wedding."

In this arrangement also she acquiesced, and he felt easier in his mind.

"It is not safe to leave you here," he said. "You and Hal must return with me."

"To Silverdale?"

"Yes."

"Will it be right? What will your mother think?"

"She approves of it, so does Agnes. I will remain in Staines all night. You can pack up, and we will return in the morning."

She smiled as she said—

"You are in a hurry.

"There is no time to lose; there is no telling what may happen in the course of a day or two."

"And about the cheque?" she said.

"I will have the money transferred to your account as we pass through London."

"I had much rather you put it in your name."

He declined, saying—

"We have plenty without it, and you can keep it in case your father has need of it at some future time."

"That is good of you."

"Not at all. I fear he is in some serious trouble, and that Schalk is at the bottom of it," he said.

Next morning they left for London. Before doing so Grant described Paul Schalk to Mrs. Melton, and asked her to say, if he called, that Mrs. Beckman no longer resided there.

On their way through London he called at the Bank, and there was no trouble in transferring the money to Denise.

"Would it be a breach of confidence for you to inform me if Mr. Ribot has a large balance left?" he asked the manager.

"I cannot tell you that," he replied. "Mr. Ribot's account fluctuates, and the withdrawal of such a large sum naturally reduces his balance considerably."

The manager had as yet heard nothing of David Ribot's disappearance. He knew Grant Halstead by name, also that he was to marry Denise Beckman. His inquiry caused him to wonder whether Ribot intended to leave London for a time; no doubt he would be informed in due course if such were the case.

The wedding took place the following week, and Grant and his bride left for the Continent, leaving Hal at Silverdale, where Mrs. Halstead said he would be quite safe.

Leaving them to enjoy their travels, it is necessary to return to Paul Schalk.

It was some time before he recovered from the blow, and when he did so he found himself in darkness. Sitting up, he held his hands to his head, collecting his confused senses. At first he hardly realised what had happened, but by degrees the scenes came back to him, and he recollected David Ribot had struck him. His head throbbed painfully. He felt the wound, and his fingers were dabbled in blood.

With some difficulty he staggered to his feet, struck a match, and lit the gas. There was no sign of Ribot; he was alone in the office. This he thought strange. How long had he remained insensible? Looking at his watch he saw that it was half-past nine. As he recovered from the effects of the blow his brain became clearer. This was an opportunity not to be neglected. He found the drawer in the desk unlocked and opened it without scruple. Rummaging amongst the papers, he came across an address: Rays Villa, Staines. Who lived there? Perhaps Denise Beckman; at any rate, he would ascertain; David Ribot had but few friends. There was a cheque-book. He examined the butts; the last one was blank. He concluded Ribot had filled in the cheque attached to it before he left the office. For what reason? It occurred to him it might possibly be to draw out a sum of money to go away with. Did Ribot think he had killed him? It was quite possible.

Paul Schalk floundered out of the room, first putting out the gas, and found his way to the outer door. In the street he hailed the first empty hansom and went home. Next morning he was unable to get up; his head swam, he could not stand. He did not wish to send for the doctor, but towards night he became delirious, and his man had no option but to send for assistance.

The doctor examined and bathed the wound on his head, asking how he came by it. This the man could not answer.

"He must be kept quiet. You must sit up with him," he said. "This blow on his head must have

been terrible. I wonder it did not kill him."

He debated whether he ought to inform the police, but the man persuaded him so earnestly not to do so that he reluctantly gave way.

"I will call early in the morning," he said.

Paul Schalk was ill for three weeks, dangerously so, and then began to recover. The first rational question he put to Andrew More, his man-servant, was—

"How long have I been ill?"

"Nearly three weeks."

Schalk almost bounded out of bed, but he was still weak, and collapsed.

Three weeks. All his plans might be upset in that time. David Ribot might have cleared out; Denise, being warned, have gone to Grant Halstead for safety. He worked himself into a terrible passion which exhausted him. When the doctor called he sternly told him if he did not keep calm and lie still, he would have another attack which might prove fatal.

"You have had a very narrow escape as it is," he said.

Schalk mastered his feelings, and when he had sufficiently recovered the doctor questioned him as to how he received the blow, but elicited no satisfactory information.

It was over a month from the attack upon him by Ribot that he was able to go out. His first step was to proceed to Staines, where he called at Rays Villa.

"Is Mrs. Beckman in?" he asked, thinking it better to presume she resided there.

Mrs. Melton recognised him from Grant Halstead's description. She at once took a dislike to him.

"Mrs. Beckman does not live here," she said.

"But she did," said Schalk.

"She left nearly a month ago," replied Mrs. Melton.

"Where is she? I am a friend of hers from Cape Town."

"I do not know; she left to be married."

"Married!" almost yelled Schalk. "I don't believe it."

"I am not in the habit of telling untruths," said Mrs. Melton indignantly.

"Is she married?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who to?"

"Where have you been, that you have not heard of it? It was in all the papers."

"I have been ill," he said.

He looked ill. She recognised he was speaking the truth.

"She married Captain Grant Halstead," she said.

Paul Schalk swore such an oath that Mrs. Melton started back frightened, shutting the door in his face.

With a hoarse laugh, he shook his fist at it and went away.

So she had escaped him after all. She had married Grant Halstead. He felt murderous in his present state of mind; he could have killed either or both of them without a thought of the consequences. He worked himself into a frenzy and swore to mar their happiness.

First of all he would settle with David Ribot; he should not escape him.

Returning to London, he drove

to Ribot's office, inquiring if he were in.

"No, Mr. Ribot is away," said the clerk, "but Mr. Upson is in."

"I will see him," said Schalk, and was shown into the room which he remembered well.

Ralph Upson, David Ribot's manager, was a shrewd middle-aged man, and had a profound contempt for Schalk.

"Where is Ribot?" asked Schalk.

"*Mr.* Ribot has gone away for some time," said Upson.

"Oh, indeed, a very likely story that. Tell me where he is, or I will put the police on his track."

Upson smiled quietly as he said, "If I were you, Mr. Schalk, I'd keep clear of the police."

"D——n your impudence, what do you mean?"

"What I say. Burglary is a serious charge."

"Burglary?" said Schalk, utterly dumbfounded.

"Breaking into our office, searching the desks, opening the safe, abstracting money, and so on," said Upson coolly.

Schalk foamed with rage.

"Assaulting Mr. Ribot into the bargain," went on the unconcerned Upson in a steady voice.

"How on earth had Upson concocted all this?" was the enraged man's thought.

"You will see, from the information I possess, it will be better for you not to go to the police," said Ralph Upson. "If you have quite finished you may go, I am busy."

To be ordered out of the office by a man formerly in his employ was too much for Paul Schalk. He made a dash at Upson, who was too wary for him, and found his wrist caught in a vice-like grip.

Schalk was still weak from his illness. The day's work had been too much for him; he was powerless.

Ralph Upson forced him into a chair.

"If you are not quiet *I* shall send for the police," said Upson.

"Tell me where Ribot is?" said Schalk.

"In Cape Town by now."

"I don't believe it," said Schalk, "but I'll find out and make the lot of you suffer for this."

"Good afternoon," said Upson, as Schalk went out in a rage.

"I think I got the better of that deal," said Upson to himself. "He doesn't know I have seen David Ribot and that he told me the whole story. You did well to trust me, David; I'll stand by you and see this thing through. Those Kaffirs have turned out trumps, and there's money in the bank. It was a fortunate thing I came across you on my way from Waterloo. You may have done wrong in your time—there's none of us got quite a clean slate—but I believe you meant to go straight when Schalk stepped in. You'll be amused when you hear what has happened. In Cape Town, are you? I know better, but it will be a deuce of a time before Paul Schalk finds out your address, or any one else for that matter, not even Mr. Halstead, good luck to him."

CHAPTER XXI

WILD POPPY

RALPH UPSON informed all inquirers that David Ribot was in Cape Town, and that he was left in charge of the business. As things went on much as usual, no questions were asked; but Paul Schalk was not satisfied. He hunted high and low for David, finding no trace of him. He saw no chance of annoying Grant Halstead and his wife except by beating him on the turf with his horses.

With this object in view, and with the assistance of Lewis Hardman, he purchased several horses, which were placed under Frank Dell's care.

When Grant and his wife returned to Silverdale, Mrs. Halstead and Agnes went away for a time.

"It seems to me we are driving you from home," said Denise. "I do not like it at all."

"Nothing of the kind, dear," said Mrs. Halstead. "We always leave Silverdale for some weeks during the year, and I want a change."

Denise was very happy. She felt her troubles were over—that she was safe from Paul Schalk's persecution. There was only one anxiety: she wondered where her father was. Ralph Upson had told Grant David Ribot was in Cape Town, but Denise doubted it. Had anything happened to him, and if so was Schalk responsible?

As the months went past and there was no word from David, she reconciled herself to wait and hope. She had grown more attached to him since he threw over Schalk and decided to have nothing more to do with him.

Grant was not long in discovering that Paul Schalk planned to defeat him on the racecourse, and had succeeded on three occasions when Morgan Cullen fancied the events were fairly good things for Grant's horses.

This annoyed Cullen and irritated Grant, who was determined not to be outwitted by such a man.

Schalk would not have succeeded single-handed, but Lewis Hardman was cute in such matters, and Dell knew how to train and place his horses. His success emboldened Schalk, and he launched out freely, spending a lot of money on horses.

The Manchester Cup was at this time a great betting race, and Dell's stable were going for a big coup over it.

Paul Schalk had a five-year-old named Wild Poppy entered, the horse being handicapped at 7 st. 6 lb. When the weights appeared there was much jubilation. Wild Poppy had run badly during the early part of the season, with a view to getting in well in the Cup, and Dell was more than satisfied.

In the same race Grant Halstead had a four-year-old named Traddles, who had run second in the City and Suburban, and won two fair handicaps since. Traddles was allotted 8 st. 4 lb., a reasonable impost, so Morgan Cullen considered. Many of the best handicap horses were entered, and the race provoked spirited speculation.

Wild Poppy was the mysterious

horse of the race; he went up and down in the market in the most extraordinary manner; at one time as much as a hundred to three was laid against him; then he came with a rattle down to ten to one. The following week again saw him at an outside price, only to make a rapid recovery in a couple of days. Backers and bookmakers were alike puzzled; there was no tracing the money that went on at long odds. On his form Wild Poppy had no chance of winning, so every one said. There were plenty of people who would not have backed him with 6 st. on his back.

There was no mystery about Captain Halstead's Traddles The four-year-old was thoroughly exposed, had shown consistent form, was a good stayer, in the hands of a popular trainer and no less popular owner. Although Parkside was a private training ground, no objection was taken to the gallops being reported in the sporting papers. Traddles was doing a thorough preparation, Kismet acting as his companion in his daily gallops.

Grant's whilom charger having developed into a 'chaser, was now proving that he was equal to holding his own on the flat. No better mate could have been found to lead Traddles. Kismet always put his heart into his work on the track. There was no shirking, he revelled in his gallops.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Cullen to Bob Bibury, who was now permanently occupied at Parkside, "Kismet will win a good handicap on the flat, if Mr. Halstead wishes it.'

"Better keep him to jumping," said Bob. "With the work he's been doing lately he'll be able to gallop over a lot of them when it comes to going over the sticks in the winter; they'll never be able to keep up with him."

Grant was often accompanied to Parkside by his wife, who took a great interest in the work of the horses, as also did Hal, who was a precocious youngster, and amused Cullen immensely.

Denise was very fond of Kismet, and the horse reciprocated the feeling; he always showed signs of pleasure when she approached him.

"To look at him no one would believe what he has gone through," said Grant.

"He seems to me to grow younger," said Denise; "look how well he moves."

Kismet was doing a strong two-mile stripped gallop with Traddles, and fairly held his own with the younger horse. When the work ended Grant asked the trainer what he thought of Traddles' chances in the Manchester Cup.

"I think he'll beat everything handicapped above him, or at about eight stone; but there's one or two dangerous ones lower down the list."

"You mean Wild Poppy, for one?" said Grant.

"On his form he has no chance with Traddles, but Mat Quince tells me Dell's people think they have a real soft thing on," answered Cullen.

"Then he cannot have been run straight," said Grant.

Morgan Cullen shook his head as he replied—

"Dell has been responsible for some big handicap coups in his time, and he's not over particular how he pulls them off."

"Has Mat ridden against Wild Poppy?" asked Grant.

Mat Quince had been engaged for Traddles in the Manchester Cup, and he was at the top of the tree in his profession. At a pinch he could ride 7 st. 4 lb., and an endeavour had been made to get him for Wild Poppy. Mat, however, was somewhat particular as to his mounts, and had not much liking for Dell's patrons, particularly Schalk, whom he cordially detested. When he had to choose between Wild Poppy and Traddles he selected Grant's horse, much to Schalk's disgust.

"He'll never ride for me again," said Schalk, at which remark Frank Dell thought—

"That won't matter to him, he can ride almost anything he likes in a race."

In reply to Grant's remark Cullen said—

"He was alongside him in the City and Suburban, and he told me after the race Wild Poppy did not try to get a place, or he would have beaten him on Traddles."

"That sounds bad for us," said Grant. "Wild Poppy had more weight in that race than he has at Manchester."

"Traddles is a ten-pound better horse than he was in the City," said Cullen.

"He'll want to be to win," was Grant's reply.

After dinner at Silverdale Grant sat chatting with Denise, and the conversation turned on the forthcoming race.

"Schalk has beaten me three times," said Grant. "I am very anxious to take his colours down in the Cup."

"He is a mean-spirited fellow," said Denise. "Why cannot he leave you alone?"

Grant laughed as he replied, "He's not likely to interfere with me, but he does his best to beat my horses."

"It's sheer spite," she said.

"One can hardly wonder at it, when I snatched such a prize from him," said Grant.

Denise shuddered as she said, "The mere thought of being touched by such a man is revolting."

"He will never get near enough to touch you; I'll see to that," said Grant, smiling.

"What do you really think of Traddles' chance?" she asked.

"I think he will win; I am almost sure he holds everything in the race safe with the exception of Wild Poppy, and I am not at all disposed to regard Schalk's horse as a wonder."

"You will take me to see the race?" she asked.

"With pleasure. Agnes is anxious to go too."

Denise smiled as she said, "Then we had better ask Captain Dyson to join us."

Grant looked up surprised as he asked quickly—

"You don't think Agnes is attracted in that quarter?"

"I am sure she likes him."

"Cecil Dyson is a jolly good fellow," said Grant. "He's been a friend of mine ever since I can remember: we were at school together. We'll ask him, Denise."

"Don't let Agnes know I mentioned it."

"All right," laughed Grant. "You've surprised me; I should never have thought of Cecil Dyson."

"I fancy your mother has an inkling, and that she approves," said Denise.

"That's probable. She has a very good opinion of Cecil."

The week before the Cup was to be decided the excitement at the clubs increased. Wild Poppy emerged from the ranks of the mysterious and became a hot favourite. All the bookmakers were agreed that he was the worst horse for the ring. Large sums had been laid at long odds, and the money had been snapped up by the stable.

Jack Sayce, the popular lightweight, was engaged to ride, and had an immense following. On the day of the race the members of the ring knew it would be impossible to hedge. Wild Poppy had won a wonderful trial—such was the latest news. Seldom had such a spin to be recorded. Schalk's horse was stated to have beaten Mameluke at level weights, and had Mameluke been handicapped in the Manchester Cup he would have been amongst the top division.

It sounded too good to be true, but on the strength of it the money poured into the market for Wild Poppy. As little as three to one was accepted in thousands, and when Schalk personally took six thousand to two thousand about his horse, it clenched the matter, and two to one became the best offer.

The trial was correct, so Frank Dell said; Wild Poppy had beaten Mameluke at level weights.

Schalk was more than satisfied. The Cup looked a certainty for his horse, and Traddles had no chance.

The thought of again beating Grant Halstead's horse gave him more satisfaction than the winning of many thousands. Every time he saw Grant and his wife his hatred increased, all the vile passions in him were stirred to their depths. Denise looked so happy; her marriage had improved her. She was more attractive; Schalk thought her more desirable in every way.

He drank heavily to drown his thoughts, and the bouts were beginning to tell. At the best he had not much self-control. He was losing what little he possessed. He became subject to fierce outbursts of rage, and some of his companions fought shy of him as a dangerous man, when these fits were on him. The blow dealt him by David Ribot frequently caused intense pain; it affected his brain; he was hardly responsible for his actions at such times.

"We shall have to get rid of Schalk," said Ben Aaron, "he's becoming dangerous."

"I'll attend to that at the proper time," said Lewis Hardman. "I've not finished with him yet."

"There'll not be much left when you give him up," thought Aaron.

CHAPTER XXII

A WARNING

"THE hottest favourite I have known for years in a big handicap."

Such was the opinion of Cecil Dyson, and most people agreed with him.

Captain Dyson came to Silverdale for the week-end, and was to accompany Grant and the others to Manchester. He was reading the paper on Saturday morning, after breakfast, when Grant entered the room.

"Anything fresh?" he asked.

"Nothing important. Wild Poppy is still at two to one; he looks like seeing an even shorter price."

"It is incomprehensible to me," said Grant. "He has done nothing to warrant it."

"If he has beaten Mameluke at level weights that is a good deal," said Cecil.

"Perhaps Dell made some mistake?"

Cecil Dyson shook his head as he answered—

"That's not likely. He knows his business too well; he's clever and dangerous."

"And not over scrupulous," put in Grant.

"Lewis Hardman is another cute man, and he has said that Wild Poppy is the best thing he ever knew of."

"It looks like Schalk beating me again, confound him. I'd give a good deal to defeat Wild Poppy."

"Let us hope you will. Traddles is just the sort of horse to do it. He'll run the race out from end to end."

"Cullen wishes him to," said Grant, "but Quince has his doubts as to the wisdom of such a policy."

"Mat is a good judge," said Cecil.

"He must carry out his orders, if we decide to do as Cullen wishes," said Grant.

"You have no fear on that account; Mat is always careful to ride to orders."

Paul Schalk journeyed to Manchester with several friends. He found it flattering to his vanity to be the owner of the favourite, and wished to make the most of his opportunities. His arrival was duly chronicled, and he was interviewed as to the chances of his horse.

Lewis Hardman accompanied him, telling Ben Aaron he meant to keep his eyes on him in case he made a fool of himself.

"Handle him tenderly," said Aaron. "I suppose Wild Poppy is all right?"

"He'll win if he can," said Hardman. "I suppose that is what you mean."

Ben Aaron seldom went to race-meetings, nor had he any intention of going to Manchester. He was in a jovial mood; the diamonds were handed over to Rhoda Simonson and she had promised to marry him. Hardman thought this anything but a matter for rejoicing, and told Aaron he would find out, when too late, that he had done a foolish thing.

"She'll make your life a misery," he said. "I know her sort."

Aaron merely laughed at him;

he was too infatuated to heed any warning.

Schalk passed his time before the race in playing cards at night and in drinking freely during the day. He liked to be pointed out as the owner of Wild Poppy, and courted publicity. The night before the race the favourite went back a point in the market, but when Schalk put more money on he recovered his position.

"You must have a pile on him," said Hardman.

"I have, and I'll win a big stake," he replied.

Grant Halstead was tempted to invest more than usual on Traddles, and the horse looked so well that he felt more confident of winning.

Cecil Dyson was not averse to a plunge when he knew anything, and he followed suit The price obtained, eight to one, was considered liberal.

Arriving on the course, Grant met Harry Grote, a bookmaker doing an enormous list business on the Continent, and also a member of Tattersall's.

"Are you aware there is a big commission in the market for your horse?" he said.

Grant looked surprised as he asked—

"Who is backing him?"

"That I don't know, but some hundreds of pounds have gone on, and there's more to be invested. I got the hint from the commissioner, so I thought I'd mention it," said Grote.

"It does not matter," laughed Grant. "We have got all our money on."

"I'm glad of it. Have you a chance of beating Wild Poppy?"

Grant knew the bookmaker was a thoroughly reliable man; he had often had transactions with him.

"I think Traddles will run a good race," he said.

"Lewis Hardman tells me their horse can't lose," said Grote.

"He may be mistaken, Wild Poppy will have to be very good to beat mine."

Grote thanked him, and determined Traddles should not be a loser for him.

Grant soon discovered the information was correct, for Traddles came down to five to one, and was a good second favourite.

"The public, or Quince's followers, must be backing your horse," said Cecil, as Grant came up to him in the paddock.

"I have just left Grote; he tells me there is a big commission in the market for him."

"Where does it come from?"

"He does not know."

"That's strange; it must be some one who knows you."

"And has faith in me, eh?" laughed Grant.

"Every one who knows you has that."

"Glad you think so, at any rate, old fellow."

Denise, Agnes, and several friends came into the paddock to see Traddles.

The horse looked perfectly trained, and attracted much attention; but it was round Wild Poppy that the crowd surged, anxious to get a glimpse at the favourite. Paul Schalk was talking with the lad holding his horse; he enjoyed the excitement, he felt elated. Sundry glasses of champagne had

already been quaffed at his expense in anticipation of the victory.

Grant, leaving his party for a few minutes to go into the ring, caught sight of Schalk. He stopped to look at Wild Poppy. He thought the horse seemed light, dull in his coat; had the appearance of being over-trained. His hopes rose; the comparison between the favourite and Traddles was, so he thought, in favour of the latter. He there and then decided to put another couple of hundred on his horse.

Paul Schalk, leaving his horse, pushed his way through the crowd and came face to face with Denise, who was, for the moment, standing alone, Agnes being occupied with Cecil Dyson.

Schalk stopped.

"You here!" he exclaimed.

Denise was about to pass on when he stepped in front of her and said—

"I congratulate you on your marriage."

She made no answer, and he went on angrily—

"You think you have played me a fine trick, but I'll have my revenge to-day, see if I don't, when Wild Poppy wins."

"Let me pass," said Denise haughtily.

"You can go," he said in a thick voice; "but I have not forgotten you, and there may come a time when I can pay you out. If the opportunity occurs I shall not forget what you have done; how you have treated me. Stick to your husband; don't let me catch you alone. There, I've given you fair warning."

Denise's face flushed angrily, and saying she was not afraid of him, or of anything he might do, she walked away. This meeting agitated her. She saw the wild look in Schalk's eyes, and knew he had been drinking. The man was dangerous and to be avoided.

She recovered her self-possession by a strong effort, and decided not to tell Grant what Schalk had said. It would only upset him, make him angry; he might seek him out and quarrel with him.

Paul Schalk looked after her, then walked on, muttering to himself that if he could get her into his power he'd pay her out. He drank more champagne and became boisterously noisy.

Lewis Hardman saw him, and taking him by the arm, said, "Leave the fizz alone until you get home; you're making a fool of yourself. If you take any more you'll not be able to see the race."

"Mind your own business," hiccuped Schalk. "I've just been making an appointment with a lady."

"Then you're a bigger fool than I took you to be," said Hardman. "Who is she?"

"That's my secret," said Schalk.

"You are welcome to keep it. Come into the stand and see the race."

"She's an old friend of mine," said Schalk.

"Oh, indeed."

"She's married."

"So much the better for you," said Hardman.

"So much the worse for her," said Schalk.

"There's the bell; come along," said Hardman, dragging him away.

Paul Schalk stumbled along.

His head was dizzy, stars twinkled as he looked; he pulled his companion by the arm. "Wait a bit," he said, "my head's bad."

"No wonder," snapped Hardman.

"It's that blow I got."

"What blow?" asked Hardman, who knew Schalk had injured his head, but was not aware how it happened.

"Didn't you know I'd been ill?" grumbled Schalk.

"Yes, but I never heard of your having a blow on the head. Did the lady's husband give it you?"

"I fell and hurt my head. The blow affects me, that's what I mean."

"And the fizz makes it worse. You'll be all right in a few minutes. The horses are going out; pull yourself together."

Schalk steadied himself and followed Hardman; they managed to secure a couple of places on the stand.

"Better now?" asked Hardman.

"Yes."

"Then take my advice. Don't go near the bar again."

The horses were coming out on to the course, and the noise in the ring became deafening.

Wild Poppy was a tremendous favourite. All the "clever" men were on him; they would not hear of defeat.

Plenty of good judges, however, pinned their faith on Traddles. Good sporting men were anxious to see Captain Halstead's colours successful, for he had not had the best of luck of late. Many of them felt there was more than mere rivalry at work between him and Paul Schalk, although they did not trouble to ask what it was. Schalk's colours had been successful many times when the black and white halves had to put up with second place; but to-day they hoped the positions would be reversed and that Grant Halstead would win. No one would have thought of coupling Mrs. Halstead's name with Paul Schalk's; the mere idea was ridiculous.

Malabar, an outsider, came out first and cantered slowly down; then came the top-weight, Dignity, a fine powerful horse, but looked rather big.

A bunch of six followed, then came Traddles with Mat Quince in the saddle. The black and white jacket was greeted with a cheer.

"Is that mine?" asked Paul, as he heard it.

"No, it's Traddles," said Hardman.

"What do they cheer him for, he's not favourite?"

"Because Mat Quince rides; he's popular, has a big following."

"So has Sayce."

"But he's not out yet."

"Where the deuce can he be?"

"There's plenty of time," said Hardman.

Wild Poppy was last out.

When the bright orange jacket was seen there was a loud cheer, and Paul Schalk said, "That's better than he got."

The favourite went past, and the cheers died down. Wild Poppy moved sluggishly, lacked fire, and Sayce had to shake him up.

"He moves none too well," said some one behind Schalk.

"Traddles goes better than any of them," said another.

Schalk turned round, and was about to make an angry retort, when Lewis Hardman said—

"Keep quiet; we don't want a row here. They'll be off in a minute."

CHAPTER XXIII

AN EXCITING STRUGGLE

"THERE'S something playing up at the post," said Grant.

"It's Malabar," said Cecil. "He's lashing out freely. By Jove, he's nearly landed Traddles. Quince has taken him on the outside."

Malabar delayed the start for some time, and Paul Schalk became impatient.

"I don't know what they want to start such brutes for," he said. "He's no chance of winning, and he might do a lot of damage. Where's Wild Poppy?"

"On the rails now; they're all in line. They are off!" said Hardman, and sure enough they were.

Malabar dashed away with the lead, pulling his tiny rider out of the saddle. He was not the sort of mount for a boy to tackle.

"Where's mine?" said Schalk, who could not see through his glasses; his eyes were misty.

"Can't just spot him," said Hardman.

"He's got away well, hasn't he?" asked Paul anxiously.

"I see him," said Hardman. "He's all right, lying about sixth, with Traddles close behind."

Malabar led the field at a merry pace, and Cecil Dyson said—

"He's playing into our hands; we want a fast-run race."

"Quince did not get a very good start," said Grant. "He's not often left."

"He's in a good place," said Cecil; "close up to Wild Poppy."

At the end of six furlongs Malabar shot his bolt, and The Heron took up the running, followed by Cheap Jack, Friday, and Clash; then came Wild Poppy and Traddles.

There was intense rivalry between Quince and Sayce. The fight for the leadership in the list of winning jockeys was considered to rest between them; so far, Mat was five ahead.

Of the two, Mat Quince had the better record, and was more popular. Sayce had been cautioned twice; Quince had never been "had up" before the stewards.

There had been complaints of unfair riding by several owners of late, and the stewards intimated they would deal severely with any rider found guilty.

Wild Poppy was going well at the end of a mile, gradually forcing his way to the front.

Mat Quince, bearing in mind what Cullen had told him, endeavoured to get Traddles in front, but at present the pace was too severe.

Paul Schalk's face was crimson. Hardman hoped he would not collapse; the excitement, combined with the champagne, was proving too much for him. The

Heron gradually dropped back, and as they came into the straight the orange jacket of Wild Poppy was seen in front.

Paul Schalk heard the name of his horse shouted, and wildly waved his hat.

"It's a walk over," he yelled. "He'll win easily."

"Looks like it," said Hardman. "But keep quiet, they have a good way to go yet."

"The farther they go the better he'll like it," said Paul, but of this Lewis Hardman had some doubts.

When fairly in the straight Quince drove Traddles along; he was rather a sluggish horse, and took a lot of driving.

Grant watched the black and white jacket anxiously; it seemed a long way back, and Wild Poppy was going at a great pace.

Mat Quince cast anxious glances ahead at his rival; Traddles was hardly running up to his expectations.

"He's a lazy beggar," thought Mat. "I'll rouse him up a bit."

He raised his whip, giving Traddles a couple of sharp, stinging cuts, which caused him to bound forward. In a few strides, however, he relapsed into his usual sluggish style of going.

Mat applied the whip again with more force.

"I'll let him see I mean it," he thought.

Traddles became aware that something was required of him. He did not relish these sharp reminders.

Mat felt his mount was going in a more resolute fashion, and kept him up to the mark.

Three furlongs from home Wild Poppy still had a good lead, but Traddles was in fourth place, close up with Cheap Jack.

A tremendous shout went up from the crowd as Wild Poppy was seen well ahead, looking "all over" a winner.

Even Lewis Hardman thought the race as good as over, and said so to Paul Schalk.

The orange jacket and white cap was out by itself, and Grant Halstead felt keenly disappointed at the prospect of being again beaten by Schalk.

"I'm so sorry, Grant," said Denise, laying her hand on his arm.

"The fortune of war," he replied, with a forced smile; "but I did think Traddles would make a better fight of it."

"He's not running up to his home work," said Cecil.

"Not by a long way," said Grant.

Still in a downhearted mood, Grant turned to look at the scene on the course. As he did so there was a terrific shout from the crowd.

"Traddles! Traddles!"

He could hardly believe his ears. A second or two ago his horse seemed hopelessly out of it.

Many men of long experience in such exciting scenes are sometimes surprised at the sudden changes in a race — so many victories are snatched on the post by some brilliant effort on the part of horse and rider.

"You never know when Mat's beaten," so the jockeys said; and the truth of the remark was now exemplified.

Grant saw the black and white

jacket and yellow cap in second place, dangerously near Wild Poppy. How had Traddles got there? Was the favourite dropping back, or had Mat forced a remarkable run?

Cecil Dyson was too surprised to speak. Denise and Agnes looked on breathless. It was a thrilling sight.

Mat Quince was riding his best—putting in all he knew, getting every ounce out of Traddles; and the horse responded with wonderful gameness. There was no flinching; Traddles stuck to his work with a will.

Jack Sayce was uneasy on the favourite. Wild Poppy suddenly collapsed: the distance was too far for him; but his jockey had such a big lead that he thought he would last it out.

Paul Schalk swayed backwards and forwards, shouting the name of his horse until he was hoarse.

"Hold up," said Hardman, "or you'll be over."

"Hurrah!" yelled Paul. "A glorious win!"

"Confound you!" growled Hardman. "Can't you see Traddles is catching him at every stride?"

"A hundred to one Traddles!" yelled Paul.

"Take no notice of him," shouted Hardman; "he's mad!"

"Sure enough he is," said a man close by. "Traddles will win."

The four-year-old was going better at the end of the race than at the beginning, and this was what Morgan Cullen expected. The trainer was desperately anxious to beat Dell's horse; there was no love lost between them.

Grant was delighted. The sudden revulsion of feeling quickened his pulses. In a moment he realised what it was to have defeat turned into a promise of victory.

Denise and Agnes waved their handkerchiefs; their faces glowed with excitement and eager anticipation. Jack Sayce's whip was going like a flail, and Wild Poppy battled on.

At last the critical moment arrived. Traddles swooped down upon the favourite, drew level, headed him.

An angry yell rose from the crowd. Sayce had brought his whip down across Traddles' face and the horse swerved. Was it intentional? Sayce hardly seemed to be aware of what he had done; Traddles had sneaked through on the rails; it might have been an accident. In any case, it was unfortunate. Traddles objected to this treatment when doing his best, and sulked. It was a moment of intense anxiety.

Grant saw the blow struck, through his glasses, so did Cecil Dyson, and many others.

Mat shouted to Jack Sayce, "That's your game, is it, you blackguard?" and then with a desperate effort kept the swerving Traddles off the rails. They were close on the winning-post, and Wild Poppy had a slight advantage.

Traddles was again forced forward by Mat and drew level. Head and head the horses raced amidst intense excitement.

As they reached the judge's box Mat lifted his mount forward and thought he had just got home.

He was right. Traddles won by a head, and Wild Poppy was

beaten, Cheap Jack filled third place, The Heron being fourth.

Grant and Cecil rushed off to the weighing room.

Mat Quince was very angry. "He struck Traddles over the head with his whip," he said, pointing to Sayce. "I ought to have won comfortably. I shall object to him for foul riding."

"Don't bother about it," said Grant; "we have won."

Mat, however, was not to be appeased, and had some angry words with Sayce, who denied that he did it purposely.

Morgan Cullen went up to Mat and pulled him away. "Take my advice," he said, "let it slide; we have won."

Mat gradually cooled down, but he was in a bad temper for some time after.

Jack Sayce had no love for Mat; he had been known to interfere with horses and riders, but on this occasion he was innocent of any intention of striking Traddles.

"Look here, Mat," he said, going up to the jockey. "We are not extra good friends, but I don't want you to think worse of me than I am. I give you my word I never meant to hit your horse. I was trying to get all I could out of Wild Poppy when you came up on the rails, and as my whip came down it struck your horse."

Mat eyed him doubtfully, then said—

"I'll accept what you say, but had Traddles been second, I'd have had to object to you."

"That's all right," said Sayce, "still it would not have been my fault."

"Your crowd are hard hit," said Mat.

Jack Sayce nodded as he said, "I shall keep out of Schalk's way. I reckon he'll be dangerous."

Grant and his friends were jubilant over their victory. Schalk had been defeated at last, and must have lost a heap of money.

Wild Poppy had given Dell's stable a splendid run for their money, but had found his match in Traddles.

Paul Schalk was furious; he raved and swore, vowing vengeance on all and sundry, saying Sayce had thrown the race away.

"Hold your tongue, and take your beating like a man," said Lewis Hardman.

"You side with the thieves," shouted Schalk.

"Sayce rode a good race; the distance was too far for Wild Poppy," said Hardman.

Paul Schalk walked off with an unsteady gait towards the paddock. He had lost a large sum, and had been spending money freely of late; still there was an ample supply to go on with, and calling to some men he knew, he proceeded with their assistance to demolish sundry bottles of champagne.

CHAPTER XXIV

SPYING OUT THE LAND

SCHALK worked himself into a frenzy, talked wildly, became quarrelsome. Lewis Hardman, finding his efforts to quieten him of no avail, left him.

Grant, surrounded by friends, received many congratulations. It was a great victory, for Wild Poppy had evidently been kept for this race.

Cecil Dyson returned to the ladies, leaving Grant with Cullen and the jockey.

Paul Schalk left the bar with an unsteady walk; he had taken more to drink than was good for him. The buzzing in his head annoyed him; he muttered angrily to himself as he went across the paddock.

As ill luck would have it, he stumbled across Grant as he stood talking with Cullen and Quince.

"You think you have done me nicely," said Schalk in a thick voice.

Grant saw he had been drinking, and turned away from him. This irritated Schalk, who said—

"I'll take it out of you next time."

"Go away," said Grant. "I do not wish to speak to you."

"Don't you? Too high and mighty, are you? Nice fellow you are, to do me out of a wife, and then insult me," said Schalk.

"Hold your tongue," said Grant angrily. "You're drunk."

"Drunk or sober, I'm more than a match for you, as you'll find out. Take care of your wife, now you've got her; that's what I say to you."

Cullen saw Grant was losing his temper, and said to him, "Come away; he is not responsible for what he says."

Grant was about to follow his advice, when Paul Schalk caught him by the arm, and said—

"You don't know her as well as I do. Women can keep secrets."

"What do you mean?" said Grant savagely.

"Oh, she's a beauty, she is. When the husband's away at the war the wife has her fling at home. It's a good job for her Beckman was killed."

"Say another word about my wife, you brute, and I'll knock you down."

Paul Schalk laughed boisterously. "Hit away," he said. "You'll find her out before long. You'll be glad enough to turn her over to me."

The insulting words were hardly out of his mouth, when Grant raised his fist and struck him full in the face.

Schalk reeled backwards, blood spurting from his mouth and nose. Recovering himself, he rushed at Grant, who stepped on one side, and his assailant measured his length on the ground.

Fortunately the next race was on, and there were not many people in the paddock, but a small crowd gathered round to ascertain what had happened.

Schalk scrambled on to his feet, looking wildly round.

"I'll report you to the stewards. I'll have you warned off for assaulting me," he said. "I'll make you pay for this, and her too."

"Leave my wife's name out of it, or I'll knock you down again," said Grant threateningly, and Schalk, seeing he meant business, walked away.

"I'm sorry you struck him," said Cullen.

"He deserved it."

"I know that, but rows in the paddock are serious matters; it may cause unpleasantness."

"I cannot help that. I am in the right," said Grant.

"Leave the course," said Cullen, "before he causes another disturbance."

"No," replied Grant. "If he reports the matter I will answer it, but I do not think he will."

"No more do I," said Mat. "He deserved more than he got. You hit hard, Captain."

Grant smiled as he said—

"If I had put all my strength into the blow he would not have got off so easily."

Paul Schalk went into the lavatory and washed his face. He was in a muddled condition, and had he not met Lewis Hardman would have gone to the stewards and reported Grant.

When Hardman heard the facts he said—

"You'll do nothing of the kind. Come to town with me."

Schalk vigorously protested, but Hardman said—

"If you go before the stewards in the state you are in they will not listen to you."

It did not suit Hardman's purpose that Schalk should make a fool of himself. By degrees he succeeded in calming him, and they drove back to town.

Next morning they went to London, Paul Schalk breathing vengeance against Grant Halstead.

"Why can't you leave him alone?" said Hardman.

"He's robbed me of the woman I wanted, and I'll pay him out," growled Schalk.

Lewis Hardman thought it highly improbable that any woman would accept such a man as Schalk, but he said—

"There's more women in the world for you to pick and choose from; you can spare him one."

"That's where you're wrong; I can't," said Schalk.

"But you will have to, now he has married her."

"Shall I. We'll see about that," said Schalk.

"You cannot run off with her," said Hardman, laughing.

"I can try."

"You'll get into serious trouble if you don't mind. No woman's worth such a risk as that."

"You have never been in love," said Schalk.

"Can't say I have," replied Hardman, thinking Schalk knew very little about it.

Nursing his hatred against Grant Halstead and his wife, Schalk thought over a plan of revenge. He could do nothing single-handed; but where was he to look for assistance in such a matter? It was dangerous to place himself in another man's power, and eventually he decided to act alone. He went down to Henfield to spy out the land, and found Silverdale was isolated, some distance from any houses, and surrounded by well-wooded land. Probably Denise, thinking herself safe, was in the habit of

walking alone here. He must try and find out.

On his return to town he sent his man, Andrew More, down to Henfield with instructions to find out everything possible about the movements of the inmates of Silverdale.

"You can stay there a month, if you like," said Schalk, "but you must find out if Mrs. Halstead goes about alone, and which are her favourite walks. You're not a bad-looking chap, and can make up to some of the girls at the house."

"It'll be an expensive job," said More.

"You'll not be short of money. Here's ten pounds to go on with. Make yourself as respectable-looking as you can, and behave yourself," said Schalk.

Andrew More thought his master a fool to take so much trouble about Mrs. Halstead; still it was no matter to him, if he was well paid for watching her and reporting her movements. What Schalk wanted with her he made no attempt to guess.

"While you are at Henfield you may as well get to know some of the lads at Parkside; that's only a few miles away, and Cullen trains Captain Halstead's horses there. You may hear what they are going for; if you do, let me know, it will come in useful," said Schalk.

Andrew More proceeded to Henfield and took up his quarters at a small public-house, the Red Lion. He was a quiet lodger, and Tom Turton, the landlord, had no objections to accept his money, although he wondered what business brought the stranger to such a place as Henfield.

More was out of the house most of the day, and at night sat in the bar, joining in the conversation, which was generally of a local character.

"Who is he?" asked more than one regular customer at the Red Lion, and Tom Turton confessed he could not make him out.

"He's quiet and respectable, so far as I can see," said Tom, "but blame me if I know what he's hanging about the village for."

"No good, I'll be bound. Perhaps he's in hiding."

Nonsense," said Tom. "He'd not put up at the Red Lion if he was."

Andrew More lost no time in making the acquaintance of one of the maids at Silverdale. She had not been there long, and was quite willing to have an admirer. He questioned her cleverly, and discovered that Mrs. Halstead often went out alone to walk in the woods, also that Grant Halstead was frequently away from home. The maid was talkative, and he easily extracted from her all the information about the household he desired. Having done this, he went to Parkside for a time, telling Turton he would return to the Red Lion in a few days.

Parkside was close to Cullen's training stables, and here Andrew More found a harder task before him.

The stable-boys at Parkside were not often in the village; when they came More found it a difficult matter to obtain information from them.

One lad, however, he succeeded in becoming on friendly terms with, and by the judicious expenditure of money in treating

him he learned that Traddles was to be specially prepared for the Cesarewitch, and that Kismet was expected to win a big steeplechase before the winter set in, probably the Great Sandown Steeplechase early in December.

When fully informed on the various matters required by Paul Schalk he returned to London and reported progress. In the meantime Schalk had cooled down, and, mainly owing to Hardman's persuasion, decided to leave Denise in peace for a time and turn his attention to beating Grant Halstead's horses.

He listened attentively to all More said, and determined to bear in mind what he had ascertained as to Denise's movements about Silverdale; the knowledge might come in useful some day.

He consulted with Hardman as to the probability of beating Traddles in the Cesarewitch, and Kismet if he ran, in the Great Sandown Steeplechase.

"That's looking a long way ahead," said Hardman. "The steeplechase is not run until December."

"All the better for me. I want a horse that can win it. Can you get me one?" said Schalk

"It ought not to be difficult. I think I know the very horse you require, if he can be bought, but it will take a stiff price"

"What's its name?'

"Checkmate."

"Whew!" whistled Schalk; 'he's a clinker, is he not?"

"Yes, he's worth a thousand."

"Can he be got for less?"

"I'll see what I can do; I know the owner."

As a matter of fact Checkmate was the property of Hardman, but ran in another name. He was a good horse, but the trainer informed Hardman that he did not think he would stand another season's training, and advised him to sell him.

Hardman had no compunction in dealing with Paul Schalk over Checkmate. He waited a suitable time, and then informed Schalk that the owner was willing to sell the horse for a thousand pounds, but would not take a penny less.

Schalk grumbled, and said it was a lot of money for a 'chaser, but Hardman argued him into concluding the sale, and quietly pocketed the thousand pounds, while saying to himself—

"If he stands training for the race, I can back him; if he breaks down, all the loss will be Paul Schalk's and not mine."

CHAPTER XXV

BOB BIBURY BUYS A TIP

THE days passed quickly. The Cesarewitch and Cambridgeshire were over, and Traddles was defeated in the longer race, not gaining a place. Wild Poppy ran third in the Cambridgeshire, and Schalk saved his money by backing him for a place.

November, ushered in by severe fogs, played havoc in various

stables at Newmarket and elsewhere, and many horses were coughing. So far the Parkside stable had escaped, and Kismet was going on well for his race at Sandown. Having won over this course, Grant thought it better to try him again on the same ground, and Cullen was of opinion he would get the distance, over three miles.

In the same race was Checkmate, and many good steeplechasers were entered.

Checkmate had done well since Dell had taken him in hand, and Lewis Hardman almost wished he had kept him; still, a thousand pounds was a good price for a horse that might break down at any moment.

Schalk knew nothing as to Checkmate's failings, nor did Frank Dell, and the trainer was sanguine he would win the Great Sandown Steeplechase.

At Silverdale everything was going on well. Grant and his wife were very happy. Shyly, and with a soft gracefulness that became her well, she imparted to him some welcome news that increased his love for her, if that were possible, and the happy event was to take place early in the spring of the following year.

"You must take every care of yourself," he said. "I shall be very anxious about you."

"Are you glad, Grant?" she asked in a low voice.

"Glad, dearest?" he said. "I am more than glad. I am in a heaven of delight; but mind what I say, and be careful."

"I shall not be able to see Kismet run at Sandown," she said. "Are you going to ride him?"

"Yes. Cullen says he will do more for me than any one."

"I wish the race was over," she said.

"So do I, and also that he had won," he said, smiling.

"It is foolish of me, I know," she said, "but ever since you had a quarrel with Schalk at Manchester I have had a presentiment he will do you some harm."

He laughed at her fears, and said--

"What harm can he do me? I assure you there is no cause for alarm."

"He has a horse entered in the steeplechase."

"What of that? I think Kismet will beat it."

"He is wicked enough to try and cause an accident," she said.

"There is no fear of that," said Grant. "He will be only too eager to beat me."

"But in case he finds his horse cannot win?"

"Then there will be no danger at all. Checkmate will be too far behind."

"He may instruct his jockey to interfere with you."

"That would be a risky game to play."

"I wish you were not riding," she said.

"Don't be foolish," he answered. "No harm will come to me. You must banish all such thoughts. You are nervous, Denise, that is all."

She was very anxious about him, but tried to conceal it, as he had set his mind on riding Kismet. What it was she feared she hardly knew, but Schalk was constantly in her mind and she dreaded what

might happen through him. She had a morbid fear of the man. Something told her he meant mischief, that he was only biding his time, waiting for a favourable opportunity to carry out some diabolical plan. It was Grant's safety she was anxious about, not her own. Schalk would not dare, nor would he have an opportunity, of molesting her at Silverdale, and she was not likely to go away from there for some time.

As the days passed her depression increased, until Grant could no longer avoid noticing it. He was troubled about her; said he would not ride Kismet, if she wished. Denise, knowing he had set his heart upon it, said—

"Ride him, Grant, and win on him, but take care of yourself."

This he readily promised to do, and spoke so cheerfully that her fears were banished for the time, but no sooner had he left Silverdale than they returned with redoubled force. At last she could bear it no longer, and sent to Parkside for Bob Bibury, who was in charge there during Cullen's absence. She could trust Bob; he was devoted to Grant, and would do anything she asked.

"Wonder what she wants?" thought Bob, when he received the message.

Mrs. Halstead and Agnes had gone to the south of France with some friends for the winter, and Denise was alone at Silverdale. She persuaded them to go, although it was with reluctance they left.

"I shall be unhappy if you remain here," she said. "It would be selfish of me to spoil your pleasure."

"We will go on one condition," said Mrs. Halstead, "that you send for us at once if necessary"; and Denise promised.

Bob Bibury found her in Grant's room, and thought she looked pale and troubled.

"I have sent for you," she said, "because I wish you to do something for me, something very important. I can trust you, I know; that is why I want your help."

"I will do anything you ask me," said Bob simply, wondering what she required of him.

"You must go to Sandown and keep near my husband," she said.

Bob stared at her in amazement. Whatever did it mean?

"I don't see how I can," he said. "I am left in charge at Parkside."

"Is there no one to take your place for a day or two?"

"There's Hedges; he'd do all right, but I don't know what Mr. Halstead will think of it."

"I will be responsible," she said. "Bob, he is in danger. I am sure of it. My heart tells me so. I am in great trouble."

"In danger!" exclaimed Bob. "Are you sure?"

"I cannot be sure, but I feel he is."

"I know, that beast Schalk—I beg your pardon," he added.

She smiled at his look of disgust and said—

"You are right. I know Schalk; I fear he will do him some injury."

"How can he?" said Bob.

"I cannot explain," she went on hopelessly, "but I dread what may happen. Bob, if you go to Sandown I shall be easier in my mind."

"But what am I to do when I get there?"

"Try and find out if there is to be any foul play in the race. Schalk is bad enough for anything."

"I see," said Bob. "You think there'll be a dead set made at the Captain."

"Yes, yes, that's it. I fear Schalk will bribe some one to ride Kismet down, force a fall at one of the fences. God knows what may happen," she said excitedly.

"Keep calm, Mrs. Halstead," said Bob. "Don't you trouble any more. I'll go to Sandown, and if I find out there's any sort of underhand work going on, let Schalk look out, that's all."

"I knew you would go. You are a good fellow, Bob."

"Perhaps I had better not let the Captain see me."

"I will leave that to you; act as you think best. If you discover anything you may have time to warn him."

"Don't you fret, Mrs. Halstead," said Bob. "It's bad for you. It will be all right; no harm will come to him if I'm there."

He spoke confidently, and looked so fierce that she smiled again.

"That's better," he said. "You trust me, I'll not fail you."

There was no time to lose. Bob Bibury left Silverdale and rode to Parkside, where he gave Hedges instructions about the horses, saying he had been sent for to go to Sandown.

Hedges saw nothing unusual in this; he had been left in charge before. All he said was—

"When shall you be back?"

"As soon as I can after the race," answered Bob.

"Not going on your own, are you?" asked Hedges.

"No," said Bob sharply.

"You needn't be angry; such things are done. I see no harm in it," said Hedges.

Bob caught the first train at Bedford, and as it sped on towards London he ruminated on the object of his journey.

"It's a rum go," he thought. "Women get strange fancies. I don't suppose there's anything wrong, but it will ease her mind to know I am on the spot. The Captain can take care of himself: all the same, I'll try and ferret out what's going on. I shall have to-night to look round, and I'll go straight to Esher."

He took a hansom from St. Pancras to Waterloo, and at this station got into an empty carriage for Esher. Just as the train was about to move off two men jumped in. Bob at once saw they had something to do with horses; he could not mistake their appearance. One of the men evidently had the same opinion of Bob, for he said to him—

"Going to Sandown?"

"Yes," said Bob. "Are you?"

"Both of us. We've come from Newmarket."

"Oh!" commented Bob. "In a stable there?"

"No, not now. We do a bit of telegraphing."

"Tipsters?" said Bob.

They laughed, and the man said—

"We give information for a consideration to a few gentlemen."

"I see," said Bob. "Can you

give me any? A win would come in handy."

The man winked knowingly as he said—

"What I know is worth paying for."

"Oh, is it?" said Bob. "Which race is the good thing in?"

"The steeplechase."

Bob became interested. He might learn something from the man. Checkmate was trained at Newmarket.

"How much do you want? I can't afford a deal."

"A sovereign."

"Too much. I'll give you ten shillings. I'm not a millionaire."

"All right; hand it over."

"No gammon," said Bob, producing half a sovereign.

"I'll tell you what I know, and it would be worth a good deal to some people."

"Fire away. What is it?" said Bob.

Although they were the sole occupants of the carriage, the man looked round in the usual mysterious and cautious way; then bending across to Bob, he whispered—

"Checkmate is sure to win; it's a dead bird."

Bob feigned to be dissatisfied.

"Any fellow knows that," he said in a disgusted tone. "I might just as well have stuck to my money."

"But you don't know as much as I know."

"Go on. What else is there? I suppose you'll say if anything beats him it will be Kismet. A nice tipster you are."

"Kismet won't win. You may bet your boots on that."

"Why?" asked Bob, who was keenly interested, although he did not show it.

"Because he'll not be given a chance."

"Captain Halstead rides the horse," said Bob.

"Oh, it's all serene as far as the Captain is concerned; he'll try and win."

"Then what's the matter? Why hasn't the horse a chance?"

"Because there's a couple of riders been squared to stop him."

"What a d——d shame!" said Bob.

"I don't say it isn't, but we know it's true."

His companion nodded.

"Which jockeys? Who are they?"

"That's more than I dare tell you; but if you watch the race you'll see what I have told you is correct. You back Checkmate, and never mind anything else."

"It's not playing the game fair," said Bob. "I don't like it."

The man stared at him, then said—

"It's not your fault. You are only taking advantage of what you know—what I have told you."

"Supposing Captain Halstead knew, do you think Kismet would have a chance?" said Bob.

"Of course he would; but he's not likely to know."

"Isn't he?" thought Bob, as the train stopped at Esher and they got out.

CHAPTER XXVI

FOREWARNED, FOREARMED

BOB BIBURY passed a restless night. For a long time he lay awake, thinking what was best to be done. When he fell asleep in the early hours of the morning he had an ugly dream. He saw Captain Halstead riding Kismet. At the water-jump a couple of horses were ridden deliberately into his mount, and all three came down. On the ground he saw a black and white jacket, and as he fancied he was running across to help his master he awoke with a start.

For some minutes he sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes, wondering what had caused him to break out in perspiration on such a cold morning. Then he remembered his dream, and discovered the cause of his fright.

"I saw him plain enough," he muttered. "Those fellows are right. I am sure something will happen if he is not warned. That's it. I'll take the bull by the horns, and give him a hint. He'll be surprised to see me, probably be angry with me for leaving Parkside; but I'll risk it and tell him."

Bob dressed hurriedly, shivering in the keen air, for as usual he slept with the window wide open, and a frosty blast came through as he washed.

After breakfast he went for a walk to get up his circulation and think the matter out. About ten o'clock he sent a telegram to Mrs. Halstead, saying there was no cause for alarm; he had seen the Captain. Having eased his conscience he went to look for Captain Halstead; he knew he was staying with his friend Cecil Dyson, who lived close by the course.

He prowled about the house for nearly an hour, and at last saw Cecil Dyson in the grounds. Bob opened the gate, and Cecil gave an exclamation of surprise as he saw him.

"What are you doing here, Bob?" he asked; then anxiously, "Anything wrong with the horse?"

"Don't know. I haven't seen him. I came from Silverdale last night. Where's the Captain?"

"From Silverdale?" said Cecil, surprised. "I hope Mrs. Halstead is well."

"She is, and she isn't," said Bob.

"What do you mean?"

"Her health's good enough, so far as I know, but she's uneasy in her mind."

He then explained to Cecil Dyson the reason he had come to Sandown.

"And I hope he won't be angry with me for leaving the horses in Hedges' care," he said.

"I'm sure he will not. But why is Mrs. Halstead alarmed?"

"Women get funny fancies in their heads," said Bob. "But she's right this time. She thinks the Captain's in danger—that some harm will come to him in the race."

Cecil Dyson looked at him curiously as he said—

"He's not likely to come to much harm on such a safe jumper as Kismet."

"Not with fair play," said Bob; "but he may not get it."

"Have you any reason to expect otherwise?"

"Yes," replied Bob, and was about to enter into details, when Grant approached.

Needless to say, he was even more surprised than Cecil to see him, and said sharply—

"What brings you here? You were left in charge at Parkside."

"Let me explain," said Cecil, and did so.

Grant was irritated. He thought it a foolish whim on Denise's part to send Bob here.

"Better listen to what he has to say," said Cecil. "After all, it is not his fault."

"On my way here from Waterloo I met a couple of fellows from Newmarket in the train," said Bob, and explained what had been told him.

Grant listened, at first seriously, then burst out laughing.

"I thought you had more sense than to take notice of a tipster," he said.

Bob felt annoyed.

"I paid half a sovereign for the information," he said, "and I believe it."

Grant laughed still more as he said chaffingly—

"It amuses me to hear you have been had at your time of life."

"There may be something in it," said Cecil. "The man would not have concocted such a story. Perhaps Schalk is going to play you a nasty trick."

"Was Mrs. Halstead very much agitated?" Grant asked anxiously.

"She was," replied Bob, "but she calmed down when I promised to look after you. I ha[ve] who was her a telegram; it will he did her."

"So you think you can pr[o]ven a me from danger?" asked Gra[nt] amused.

"I'll do my best, Captain."

"I am sure you will," said Cecil. "I think you were right in coming."

"He's here, so it is no good making a fuss about it," said Grant; "and I have no doubt everything will go on right at Parkside."

"I am sure it will," said Bob.

"What are you going to do?" asked Cecil.

"Nothing."

"But I think you should."

"How can I? There is nothing to go upon."

"Tell the stewards, before the race, you have reason to believe that a dead set will be made at you. Mention Schalk's name if you like; he is not in very good odour with the authorities," said Cecil.

"That would not befair," said Grant.

"It is probably true."

"Do you know which riders the man alluded to?" asked Grant."

"He declined to give names," said Bob.

"That proves he knows nothing; he has hoaxed you."

"I am sure he has not," said Bob.

"There may be some danger," said Cecil. "Schalk sticks at nothing. Let me ride Kismet, and wire Mrs. Halstead I am to have the mount; think of the relief it will be to her."

"It's very good of you to offer to take my place," said Grant,

"but if there is danger I prefer to face it, not rely upon a friend."

"No one doubts your courage, Grant," he said, smiling. "I was thinking of Mrs. Halstead."

"She would never forgive me if anything happened to you."

Although Bob Bibury's story seemed highly improbable, still Grant could not get rid of the feeling that there was some truth in it.

"I will not make any statement to the stewards," he said, after a pause, "but I will keep my eyes open during the race. I shall soon discover if there is any underhand work going on."

"And if there is?" said Cecil.

"Then I shall find out who is responsible for it, and if it can be brought home to Schalk he shall suffer."

On the course Bob Bibury tried to find the man who had given him the information, but for some time was unable to do so. At last he caught sight of him near the bar in the paddock, and going up to him asked him to have a drink.

"You are quite sure you made no mistake last night?" said Bob.

"Certain of it."

"It's a shame that a gentleman cannot ride in a steeplechase without some scoundrel trying to bring him down."

"So it is, but it's not my fault."

"Can't we stop it?"

The man looked surprised as he said—

"Stop it? We're likely sort of people to do that. You seem interested in Captain Halstead."

"I am. I'm his servant."

"Well, I'm blessed," exclaimed the tipster.

"I've been through many a tough struggle with him. We've fought Zulus, and ridden hard for our lives. He saved me once at the risk of his life. Now you know why I'm interested in him."

"Is he Halstead of Beckman's Horse?"

"The same. He took Beckman's place."

"That's stranger than ever."

"Why?"

"Because I had a brother in Beckman's Horse; he wrote and told me what a dare-devil Halstead was—more so than Beckman."

"He told you right," said Bob. "What's the name? I was in Beckman's horse."

"You'll not split on me if I tell you, 'cause his name's same as mine."

"No; I promise you."

"Fred Mahon, that's the name. I'm Dick Mahon."

"Shake," said Bob, holding out his hand. "I knew him; he was a good sort. Of course you know——" then he stopped.

"Eh? What?" said Mahon.

"You don't know he's ——"

"Not dead?"

"Yes; he died in hospital before we left Cape Town."

"Poor Fred," said Mahon in a shaky voice. "I knew he was ill, and when I did not hear from him I feared the worst."

"I'm sorry," said Bob. "He's gone; we don't want to see the Captain injured, maybe killed, today, do we?"

"No, by heaven I don't."

"Then come with me and tell him all you know."

"I daren't."

"Why?"

"They'd flay me alive if they found out."

"He'll take care you suffer no injury through him."

"I'll risk it, for Fred's sake."

"Well done. Come with me," said Bob.

Captain Halstead explained to Morgan Cullen what had brought Bob to Sandown, and the trainer looked serious.

"We ought to make some complaint," he said.

"So I think," said Cecil Dyson, and as he spoke Bob came up with Mahon.

"This is the man who gave me the information," said Bob, and stated what Mahon had told him about his brother being in Beckman's Horse.

"That's strange," said Grant, "very strange; there's more than luck in this."

"If you will promise not to bring my name up I'll give you the names of the riders I heard were to take care of Kismet," said Mahon.

Grant promised, and he said—

"Readon and Hallows; they're the men."

"There's Schalk with Hallows now!" exclaimed Cullen, and they saw the owner of Checkmate in close conversation with the jockey.

"That's proof to a certain extent," said Grant. "Why should he wish to consult Hallows?"

"Better tell the stewards before it is too late," said Cecil.

"It seems childish," said Grant.

"Not at all, it's serious," said the trainer.

"Come along, there's no time to lose," said Cecil, and Grant reluctantly complied.

There was not much difficulty in obtaining access to the stewards, both Grant and Cecil were known to them.

The result of the interview was that the jockeys Readon and Hallows, much to their amazement, were called before the stewards, who stated what they had been informed about them and administered a severe caution. Both riders denied there was any truth in the statements, but it was easy to see they were alarmed and uneasy.

"Who do you think tampered with these riders?" asked one of the stewards, as Cecil stood close by the stand.

"If you wish for my opinion, I credit Paul Schalk with it," he said, "but I have no proof. You are probably aware that he is an enemy of Captain Halstead's."

"I have heard something about a quarrel at Manchester. So far as I know, Schalk only met with his deserts."

"That is so," said Cecil.

"Schalk has a bad name. We can do nothing in the matter. I think Captain Halstead will not be interfered with by Readon or Hallows; they were thoroughly frightened," said the steward, smiling.

Paul Schalk, unaware of what had taken place, was plunging heavily on Checkmate in the ring, and there was every prospect of the horse starting a hot favourite.

Bob Bibury and Dick Mahon were in earnest conversation, the result being that the latter went to the telegraph office and sent many wires with Kismet's name on, as the probable winner of the steeplechase.

CHAPTER XXVII

THREE AND A HALF MILES

CHECKMATE was a hot favourite for the steeplechase. As the horses filed on to the course he stood at six to four in the ring. Frederic Wack, familiarly known as "The Kid," had the mount on Schalk's horse; he was a clever rider and a favourite with backers. Kismet was a sound second favourite at three to one, and several others were backed. Paul Schalk regarded the victory of his horse almost as a foregone conclusion and supported him accordingly. Lewis Hardman invested a considerable sum on Checkmate, and put a saver on Kismet in case of accidents. He was rather surprised at the reckless way in which Schalk backed his horse, and said—

"You are very confident of winning. How much have you put on?"

"More than you'd care to invest," said Schalk. "But you don't know as much as I do."

"I fancy I know as much about Checkmate as any one."

"You watch the race and you'll see what will happen," said Schalk.

When Readon and Hallows left the stewards' room they agreed it would not be safe to carry out the plan suggested by Schalk, and for which they had been paid.

"He ought to be told," said Hallows.

"In that case he'll want the money back."

"Of course he will."

"Keep quiet about it," said Readon. "My mount has no chance, you are in the same fix; if we keep in the rear we shall have a good excuse for not interfering with Kismet."

"I see—say we could not get on terms with him," said Hallows.

"I'd like to find out who gave the information," said Readon.

"So would I," said Hallows.

Had Paul Schalk known everything he would not have been so sure of success. Whenever six to four was obtainable against Checkmate he accepted it, and finally a point less was the best offer.

There was no delay at the post, and the dozen horses soon started on their journey. Old Boy set the pace for a mile, with Acorn and Glowworm in the rear; they were ridden by Readon and Hallows.

Old Boy possessed pace and jumped well, his light weight serving him. Checkmate was lying third, with Grant Halstead on Kismet in sixth place.

When more than half the distance had been compassed Paul Schalk became anxious. What were Readon and Hallows doing so far behind? They had no chance of blocking Kismet. He began to think he was sold—that the jockeys had thought better of it, and decided not to carry out the plan arranged. If they played this trick upon him he would have a reckoning with them after the race.

Old boy gradually dropped back at the end of two miles, and Checkmate ran into first place; he was going well, fencing in good form, up to this point galloping like a winner.

Kismet seemed a long way

behind, but Grant knew his mount and how to ride him.

"You'll win the race in the last half-mile," was Cullen's comment as he mounted.

Cecil Dyson smiled as he saw where Acorn and Glowworm were running; he wondered what Schalk thought about it. Evidently the stewards' caution had the desired effect.

The three and a half miles soon found out the weak spots in the field, and long before the home turn was reached there were only four horses with any chance of success; they were Checkmate, Kismet, Donald, and Hopeful. Far away in the rear were Acorn and Glowworm, and as Schalk watched them his face grew black as thunder, and he commenced to mutter threats.

"They've done me," he thought. "Taken my money and thrown me over. If they fancy they can do that with impunity, they're wrong. I'll settle with them later on."

As he turned his attention to Checkmate his spirits rose; his horse appeared to have an easy task before him. Kismet was a long way behind, but quickly made up ground in the next furlong or two.

Lewis Hardman had his doubts about Checkmate; he fancied he might break down. Frank Dell did not know as much about the horse as his former owner, or he would not have been so sanguine.

Fred Wack fancied the race was over as Checkmate came up the hill pulling hard, but he had a wholesome dread of Kismet, and meant to throw no chances away.

Kismet was a thorough stayer, and Grant knew he would finish as fast as he commenced. Up the rise came the black and white jacket; people were surprised at the pace the horse possessed. The distance between Checkmate and Grant's mount diminished fast; the excitement was intense; still the favourite had the advantage.

Schalk's anxiety became painful. He had a large sum at stake, more than he would have risked had he not been sure that Kismet was "safe." His speculations of late had been disastrous; he little thought Hardman was gathering in what he lost. Had he known it would not have been well for Hardman. A win of some thousands over Checkmate would be useful, very useful, at the present time, as he intended going to Monte Carlo to try his luck at the tables and get away from the winter in England.

A shout from the ring roused him and he saw Kismet was almost on terms with his horse. He did not lose heart; he thought Fred Wack more than equal to Grant Halstead in a tight finish.

At this critical point Checkmate was going under full pressure in order to stall off Kismet's challenge. Had Fred known the horse's weakness he might have saved him more during the early stages of the race, but he had no idea he had ever broken down or gone lame. Kismet, once he got alongside a horse, held on with grim tenacity, and Checkmate was finding his match. Had Schalk's horse been thoroughly sound he might have stood the strain, but it was asking too much of him under

the circumstances. Checkmate struggled on, but Kismet's challenge found out his weak spot, and about a hundred yards from the winning-post he broke down badly, almost throwing Fred out of the saddle. The jockey pulled up and dismounted, leaving Kismet to win in the easiest possible style.

When Paul Schalk saw Checkmate in this hopeless condition he behaved like a madman. He rushed about the ring, crying out that he had been swindled, that his horse had been got at, and so on.

"If you don't keep quiet you'll be locked up," said Hardman; "the police are watching you."

"D——n the police!" yelled Paul. "What do I care for them?"

The sergeant in charge of the ring came to Lewis Hardman and said—

"It will be the best thing for him to lock him up until he is quieter; he's over-excited. It will be a kindness to him. In his present state he might do some injury; he's hardly responsible for his actions."

"You try and manage him, I can't," said Hardman.

The sergeant beckoned a couple of policemen, then he went up to Schalk and took hold of his arm.

"Come with me for a few moments; I wish to speak to you," said the sergeant.

Paul glared at him; then noticing his uniform, pulled himself together a bit.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"To find out if you can give me any information about your horse being got at," said the wily sergeant.

Paul stared; then he said, "Perhaps you know something about it?"

The sergeant looked knowing. "Come with me," he said, and Schalk followed him.

When they were safely in the room the sergeant said, "I'll leave one of my men with you and return in a few minutes."

Schalk was not so confused that he did not know he had fallen into a trap, but he kept quiet; there was nothing else to be done. Gradually, as he became calmer, he realised this was the best thing that could have happened; had he been allowed to rush about the ring and paddock, there was no telling what folly he might have been guilty of. He sat still, plotting vengeance against many people, Grant Halstead and his wife in particular. He blamed them all for his bad luck; how, it would have been difficult for him to explain.

Checkmate had broken down so badly that Dell decided he could not be taken home at present, and made arrangements for the horse to remain.

Kismet was none the worse for his three-and-a-half-mile gallop; he pulled up quite fresh, and full of playfulness.

"You see there was no danger after all," Grant said to Cecil.

"There would have been had we not gone to the stewards," was the reply.

"Schalk has had a nasty knock, so I hear," said Morgan Cullen. "He's lost heavily."

"I'm sorry his horse broke

down," said Grant. "I would much rather have beaten him without that advantage."

"I wonder who sold Checkmate to Schalk?" said Cullen.

"His owner, I expect," said Grant.

"Yes, but who was the owner when he bought him?"

"The trainer; he ran in his name."

"I know that, but he didn't own him."

"How do you know?"

"He told me so. He also said Lewis Hardman owned him at one time."

Grant laughed as he said, "Perhaps it was Hardman who sold him to his partner; not a very friendly deal, was it?"

"I don't suppose Schalk knew Checkmate had broken down badly once when he bought him," said Cullen.

"Had he?"

"Yes."

"Then Dell deserves credit for bringing him to the post in such good condition; he almost lasted the race out," said Grant.

"I expect Schalk will not be of the same opinion."

Grant returned to Silverdale the same night, and Denise was thankful to see him safe and sound. He laughed at her for sending Bob Bibury to Sandown to look after him, but said that as it happened it was just as well he came. He then told her of Bob's warning, of Mahon's story, and how the jockeys were brought before the stewards and cautioned.

"Then my fears were not groundless," she said. "Grant, I wish Paul Schalk was out of the country; I cannot feel quite easy about you while he remains here."

"I am afraid we shall have to put up with him," he said. "We can avoid him, that will not be difficult."

"Did you see him at Sandown?" she asked.

"Not after the race. He disappeared—perhaps left the course in disgust."

Paul Schalk certainly left the course; but it was after the bulk of the people had gone. The sergeant behaved very well towards him, and Schalk had the sense to acknowledge his temporary detention was the best thing that could have happened to him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THE RED LION.

DURING the winter Paul Schalk went to Monte Carlo, and at first luck favoured him; he won a large sum at the tables, and had he returned to London then, as he intended, all might have been well. The temptation to win more, however, proved too strong, and he remained.

There is only one certainty at Monte Carlo, and that is—the bank wins in the end. Some plungers win money and depart with the spoil; these men are heard of as large winners, but the losers are seldom talked about,

except when a pistol-shot ends their trouble, or they are found drowned.

Monte Carlo is a beautiful spot; nature has favoured it bountifully, but man has defaced it, turned it into a wilderness of darkness, wherein men and women grope blindly for gold. There is no more pitiful sight than to watch the faces of gamblers whose all depends upon the turn-up of a card.

Paul Schalk lost, won again, lost again, plunged in a reckless manner, and at the end of February was well-nigh ruined.

His losses maddened him. He saw his folly now it was too late; he ought to have gone home a month before, when his pockets were full. When he won big stakes he had plenty of friends who courted and flattered him; no sooner did he commence to lose than they fell away from him, and eventually he was left alone.

Men who had spoken to him and dined with him on his arrival passed him by without recognition, ignored his presence, gave him a blank stare of surprise if he ventured to address them. It was necessary for him to send to London for money, and he wrote to Lewis Hardman. The letter he received in reply caused him to choke with anger. Hardman sent a draft for a hundred pounds (Schalk asked for five times the amount), and wrote that things were going from bad to worse, and that his, Schalk's, speculations had turned out disastrously.

"You have been frequently advised by Aaron and myself not to speculate on your own account," he wrote. "You have done so, and must take the consequences. I may as well tell you straight out that Aaron has determined you shall no longer be a member of our firm; your wild-cat investments bring discredit upon us, and consequently we suffer for your folly. Take my advice, and come home at once to settle up matters while you have some cash left.

Paul Schalk tore the letter up furiously. So this was how they treated him. He accused them of robbing him—he was not very wide of the mark—and called down vengeance on their heads. His reply to Lewis Hardman's letter only made matters worse.

Schalk purchased his railway-ticket to London, left ten pounds in his room, gambled with the balance, losing it all.

Arriving in London, he went to the office of Aaron, Hardman, & Co., and found Ben in. He received cold comfort from this astute manipulator of other people's money, and retorted in savage fashion. Ben Aaron was not unaccustomed to verbal attacks, and to be called a rogue and a swindler merely caused him to smile. He had obtained the wish of his heart and had married Rhoda Simonson. When he informed Hardman of the fact his comment was—

"So you have put your head in the noose at last! Mind she doesn't pull it too tight to be pleasant."

Schalk met his match in Ben Aaron. The man cowed him by his firmness. In a cool, calculating manner, Aaron pointed out to Schalk that it was entirely his

own fault that matters had come to a crisis.

"You have been warned," he said, "and you preferred to go your own way. The last deal of yours in Sponfleet mines about cleared you out."

"You held a heap of shares in them," said Schalk.

"But I got rid of them in time. You were the fool, you kept on buying," said Aaron.

It suddenly occurred to Schalk that he might have bought Aaron and Hardman's shares in Sponfleets; the mere idea made him gasp.

"I've been robbed, swindled, done by you and your vile partner," roared Schalk.

"May I ask you to point out in what way you have been done?" asked Ben mildly.

"You unloaded the shares and I bought them."

"That is possible. Orders were given to sell; you may have bought. Where does the swindling come in?"

"As a member of the firm, my shares ought to have been sold with yours."

"My dear fellow, you could not expect us to sell Sponfleets for you when you persisted in buying more. What would you have said had they gone up instead of down?" said Ben.

"It's a swindle. You're an old thief. Do you know those diamonds you bought from Jacques were stolen and sold in Cape Town?"

"No, I do not know, and it matters very little to me where they came from. I bought them and paid for them."

"How would you like to be made to give them up?" said Schalk.

"Look here, my friend, just mind your own business. I'm not the sort of man to be bluffed. You can go as soon as you like, and remember your name will be struck out of our firm," said Ben.

"And if it is, look out for yourself," said Schalk menacingly.

"I shall most certainly do that," answered Ben.

Paul Schalk was ruined; he could no longer ignore the fact. He had a small sum of ready money, but it would not last long. As he looked back over the past two or three years he firmly fixed the idea in his mind that the whole of his misfortunes were due to leaving Cape Town at the command of Grant Halstead. Had Halstead not interfered, he, Schalk, would have been married to Denise and all would have gone on well. Denise! She was happy, living in luxury at Silverdale: and David Ribot, where was he? Schalk had heard nothing of him since he disappeared. Ralph Upson knew where he was, of that he was certain: no doubt the business was being carried on in Ribot's interests with Ribot's

money. Probably Denise knew where he was and communicated with him; mocked at him, Paul Schalk, in her letters. He pictured them laughing over his misfortunes, congratulating themselves on having got rid of him, and the thought of their merriment at his expense infuriated him.

Constantly brooding over imaginary wrongs made Paul Schalk dangerous. One thought dominated, obtained complete possession of him, it was to pay Denise, her father, and Grant Halstead out. They laughed at him; let them take care their laughter was not changed into tears. He had lost his money, lost Denise, David Ribot had escaped him; but there was something left—revenge.

His man, Andrew More, became alarmed at Schalk's sudden fits of rage. He had no desire to live with a madman. He gave notice, and Schalk, in a fit of temper, cursed him and told him to go at once.

"Pay me, and I will," said More, and Schalk did so.

Andrew More, having nothing better to do, wondered whether he could go over to the other side with profit to himself. It was a delicate matter. He would have to confess that he had played the spy, but he might pose as a repentant wrongdoer, anxious to repair any harm he had caused. Paul Schalk meant mischief; of this he felt sure, and probably his visit to the vicinity of Silverdale was connected with his evil intentions.

More went to Henfield again, putting up at the Red Lion.

"What brings him here?" thought Tom Turton.

"Does Mr. Halstead ever come here?" asked More one night, when he and Turton sat smoking together.

"You mean Captain Halstead?"

"Yes."

"He has been in my house, but it's seldom he calls; the Red Lion is hardly in his line."

"He fought in Africa, didn't he?"

"Yes, in the Zulu war; commanded Beckman's Horse."

"Then no doubt he was in Cape Town some time?"

"I believe he met his wife there," said Tom.

Schalk had lived in Cape Town; perhaps he and Captain Halstead were old enemies.

Next morning Tom Turton stood looking out of the bar window, when he saw Captain Halstead riding down the street.

"Here's the Captain," said Tom, turning round to More, who hurried to the window.

Grant Halstead saw Tom and waved his hand to him, then reining in his horse, said—

"I want a word with you, Tom. I'll call on my way back."

"Very good, sir," said Tom.

Grant called at the Red Lion

and had a short conversation with Turton. He was about to leave, when Andrew More touched his hat to him and said—

"May I have a few minutes' conversation with you, sir?"

Grant looked surprised.

"I am in a hurry," he said. "Is it important? I don't recollect having seen you before."

"I was Paul Schalk's servant until a few days ago," he said. "It's about him I wish to speak to you."

"Come in here," said Grant, opening the door of a private room.

"Well, I'm blest," said Turton to himself. "He's plenty of cheek, has Mr. More, and no mistake."

"Now, what is it?" said Grant.

Andrew More commenced his story in a rambling fashion, and Grant checked him.

"Come to the point," he said. "You acted as Paul Schalk's spy. He has thrown you over, now you come to me. Don't make any fuss about your being sorry for what you have done; I can see through all that nonsense."

More was rather taken aback at this straightforward way of addressing him.

"I really am ashamed of acting as I did down here," he said.

"Very well; if you stick to it, I'll take it for granted you are," said Grant. "Go on, please."

Andrew More then proceeded to explain that for some time past Schalk had been scheming and plotting mischief against some one.

"He's in a dangerous mood," said More. "He's lost nearly all his money, he has no friends, and he drinks heavily. I was afraid of him, that's why I left. It's my belief, sir, it's Mrs. Halstead, begging your pardon, that he's so bitter against, or why would he have sent me down here to watch and find out about her movements? You have been in Cape Town, and he comes from there. Putting things together, I came to the conclusion you might have had some quarrel over there."

Grant was in no wise disturbed on his own account by More's statement, but there might be danger to Denise; in her present state of health it was necessary she should suffer no shock. The mere sight of Paul Schalk anywhere near Silverdale would disturb her seriously.

"You acted the spy, and deserve a thrashing," said Grant sternly.

Andrew More moved uneasily in his chair and looked towards the door.

Grant smiled as he said, "You need not be alarmed. I said you deserved a thrashing; men do not always get what they deserve. You have made some amends by telling me this, and I will recompense you; but I wish you to do something for me."

"Willingly, sir."

"Remain at the Red Lion; keep a sharp look out for Schalk, and if you see him about let me know at once," said Grant.

Andrew More promised, and Grant mounted his horse and rode away.

As he watched him, More said to himself, "I didn't like the look of him when he said I deserved a thrashing. Paul Schalk will find more than his match in the Captain."

CHAPTER XXIX

SCHALK'S REVENGE

PAUL SCHALK'S funds were almost exhausted, and he saw no prospect of making a recovery. Frank Dell sent him in a heavy bill, and Schalk told him to take over his horses in payment. With nothing to do, and no friend to help him, he loafed about from one hotel to another, drinking himself into a maudlin condition. He saw Grant Halstead in town, and this roused his animosity against him to fever heat. He went to Henfield, and from the station walked in the direction of Silverdale. He had no fixed purpose for doing so; if he by any chance met Mrs. Halstead he did not know how he would act. He avoided the village, and Andrew More, hanging about the Red Lion, was not aware of his arrival.

Grant Halstead happened to be in London, and Denise, unaware of the presence of her enemy in the vicinity, went for a walk, taking Hal with her.

The woods were bare and wintry-looking, but there was plenty of cover in the fir plantations.

She walked slowly, Hal running about, startling rabbits and an occasional pheasant, thoroughly enjoying himself. He had his fox-terrier Don with him, and the wiry little fellow was in his element, chasing rabbits and barking at the whirring birds.

The dog started a rabbit in the hedge-bottom; it darted across the path, and he followed at full speed, the boy after him. Denise watched them, amused at their eagerness.

She heard the dog barking furiously in the plantation, and Hal rushed out, running towards her, with a pale frightened face.

She clasped him in her arms, asking what had alarmed him.

"He's in there, the big man, the man who stole me from you," said Hal, trembling. "Come away, mother, he's in there."

The dog was still barking. Denise knew Hal could have made no mistake. Paul Schalk

must be hidden there—for what purpose? She was some distance from the house; there was no one about. She dared not run—what was she to do?

"Go home as fast as you can; run and tell James I want him at once, to come here with help, to bring some of the men," she said.

Hal hesitated; he did not like to leave his mother.

"Run at once," she said firmly. "I will follow you; the man wishes to take you from me again. He will not harm me; run."

Hal started off, and as he did so there was a sound of crackling branches and dead wood in the plantation, and Paul Schalk came out on to the path, the dog barking at his heels. He picked up a piece of wood, hurling it at Don. It struck the dog, and he yelped, but held his ground, still barking.

Denise shivered: she was terribly frightened. Schalk looked wild, his eyes glared; there was a wicked smile on his face. He stood a few yards from her.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Come to pay you a visit," he said. "You don't seem glad to see me."

"You had better go," she said. "It will not be well for you if you are caught here."

"I want a word or two with you first," he said, coming towards her.

"I do not wish to speak with you. Go," she said.

"You have behaved badly towards me," he said. "I have you at a disadvantage, and I mean to make the most of my opportunity. I have waited to meet you alone."

"If you do not go I will call for help," she said. "My child has gone for assistance."

"Then you fear me," he sneered. "You have reason for doing so; I am not in a mood to be trifled with."

"What do you want?" she said, hoping to keep him at bay until help came.

"What I have wanted ever since I first saw you," he said. "I want you." He came nearer.

Denise was terrified. There was no telling what he might do. She called loudly for help.

"Stop that," hissed Paul, as he sprang upon her, caught her round the waist, and placed his hand over her mouth.

She struggled fiercely, wrenching herself away from him; again she screamed, and the sound pierced through the woods.

Schalk's blood was up; he looked like a savage. This time he caught her round the neck, stifling her cries. She fought with all her strength, but soon felt faint. What would become of her, she thought, if she became unconscious?

He dragged her towards the plantation; she caught hold of a

branch as he pulled her along, and held on fast. To loosen her hold he removed his hand from her throat; again she cried for help.

Wrenching the branch from her grasp, he forced her along.

"You are in my power," he said savagely. "There is no one here. It would have been better for you to listen to me. You're mine now—mine! Do you hear?"

She heard; and every nerve in her body tingled with fear. He looked more like a beast than a man. The courage of despair possessed her, and she fought furiously, scratching his face, biting his hand, until he called out in pain.

Throwing her from him, she fell on the ground. He bent over her to raise her, when the terrier, Don, seized him by the calf of his leg, and he swung round with a yell.

Denise had fainted, and lay still on the ground.

Schalk heard a sound of footsteps. It was a man running. He looked up, and saw Andrew More coming towards him at a fast pace.

Schalk caught up a thick branch from the ground, swung it round, and as More came up brought it down on his head. He fell like a log.

"You here?" said Schalk. "So you've given me away, have you? Well, you won't get over that blow in a hurry."

Again he stooped over Denise. He was about to drag her along, when he heard more sounds. This time there were several men running. He had no time to lose.

With an oath he turned round and disappeared in the plantation. He was too unwieldy to run fast, but he made the best of his way, as he thought, in the direction of the station.

Hal reached Silverdale and gave the alarm. James and three of the men set out at once towards the woods. Hal followed at some distance. He could not keep up with them. Great was their consternation when they saw Mrs. Halstead insensible on the ground and More lying some yards away. Schalk had dropped the stick after striking the blow, and they came to the conclusion that More had attacked her and she had defended herself.

James picked up his mistress, holding her in his arms and trying to revive her.

"He must have attempted to rob her," he said, pointing to More. "Go for the police, Dick, and you, Will, run to the house and bring the carriage. She must be taken home at once."

Hal came up panting, and in answer to James said More was not the man he had seen when his mother sent him to the house.

"It was the big fat man," he

said, "the man who stole me when we were in Cape Town."

"Are you sure?" asked James.

"Yes; he must have run away." Then seeing his mother insensible, he began to cry.

Andrew More recovered and sat up, gazing round bewildered at the scene before him.

"He's gone," he said. "After him, I say; he'll make for the station. Don't let him escape. I heard cries for help as I was walking along the path, and ran up. He struck me with that stick."

He staggered to his feet, and started to run, but his head swam, and he fell down again.

"Go after him," said Hal.

"Catch him if you can," said James, and two of the men looked about for traces to see in which direction he had gone. The ground was soft, and they soon found Paul Schalk's footprints.

By this time more help had arrived from Silverdale, and a regular hunt commenced. As they approached the village their cries were heard, and others joined in.

"He'll not go to the station," said one; "he'll know we are sure to follow him there."

They spread out in various directions, running rapidly.

Paul Schalk reached the far side of the wood and sneaked down the hedge-side; he dared not go into the open. After a time he heard the sounds of pursuit. A pretty mess he had made of it, he thought, and cursed his folly. There was no help for it; he must try and hide somewhere. This was easier said than done. In the distance he saw the railway line; he might reach it and slink along the hedge towards the station. He fancied they would not look for him there; it was too public.

He started to run across the field, and got halfway over, when a yell in the rear told him he was seen.

Panting, struggling desperately, he stumbled along. The cries increased; they were hard on his track. He hardly knew where he was going, but kept on blindly.

Looking ahead, he saw white smoke curling in the air. A train was coming. It would slow down before it entered the station; he might reach the line and scramble on.

One look round showed him a number of men pressing hard after him. He preferred the risk of boarding the moving train to falling into their hands.

Reaching the hedge he crashed through, tearing his hands and face with thorns, ripping his clothes.

The driver of the train saw this wild-looking man near the line, and whistled sharply several times.

Schalk waved his hand, and the train came on. It was going at a moderate pace, and the driver

wondered what Schalk was doing there.

It was a goods train, and as the engine passed him the driver called out—

"Keep clear! What are you doing here?"

Schalk made no answer; he watched the trucks as they went past. There was no time to lose, half the train had gone by. His pursuers were coming nearer; he must risk it.

He made a wild clutch at the end of an empty truck. He caught hold of the side, but had not reckoned on his weight. He was dragged off his feet; his bulky body was too much for his hands to support, and they slipped from the truck.

Paul Schalk fell, and as he fell saw where he was going, between two trucks on the line. In these one or two seconds he lived a lifetime. All his sins came vividly into his mind; he shrieked in his agony, then crashed down. There was a sickening, grinding sound, and as the train passed it left an unrecognisable heap on the line.

When Schalk's pursuers came up they shuddered at the sight.

Meanwhile the insensible form of Denise Halstead had been tenderly taken to Silverdale.

She was laid on her bed and the doctor sent for.

When Grant Halstead arrived home he was crushed at the stunning blow that had fallen upon him.

Denise hovered between life and death.

The doctor consulted with the two eminent men who came down by special train from London.

Grant sat like a man in a trance in his study; he hardly realised what had happened.

The door opened and the doctor entered quietly.

He placed his hand on Grant's shoulder and said—

"Bear up, Mr. Halstead; we can save her life, I feel sure of it, but——"

Grant looked up as he hesitated, asking, without speaking, what he meant.

"The child is dead!" he said.

CHAPTER XXX

SATISFIED

FOR some weeks Denise hovered between life and death. Sometimes she rallied, then as quickly relapsed; these sudden changes puzzled the doctors. She was tenderly nursed by Agnes and her mother; they had at once returned from the south of France on receipt of Grant's telegram.

Grant was overwhelmed at the trouble that had fallen upon him. He seldom left the house; outdoor exercise was neglected; he became haggard and pale, his hair was streaked with grey, he looked ten years older.

"If you do not rouse yourself you will be ill," said the doctor, "and that will be bad for Mrs. Halstead; it will retard her recovery."

At this Grant made an effort, went out on horseback, but did not go far away.

At last, after three months' suspense, Denise was pronounced out of danger and allowed to come downstairs.

What a day of rejoicing it was for all of them! The relief was immense, there was no longer a terrible dread hanging over them.

Her recovery was rapid. She was soon able to go out into the gardens.

Grant heard all about Schalk's death from Andrew More and James. It was from Denise he learned what had taken place in the wood, and he almost wished Schalk had lived, so that he could call him to account. It drove him almost mad as he thought of Denise being in the power of that brute, and of what might have happened had not help arrived.

"He met a terrible death," said Denise, shuddering. "He has paid the penalty; we will try and forget he ever lived."

Grant was also troubled about the loss of his child, as also was Denise. Mrs. Halstead said he ought to be thankful she had been spared, and that the loss of the child was necessary to save the mother's life.

It was not until late in the autumn that Grant went about again and took an interest in his horses. None of them had run during Denise's illness, but Cullen had kept them in good condition, with an eye to back-end engagements. The sensational attack on his wife by Paul Schalk had, of course, become public property; the facts were fully brought out at the inquest. Much sympathy was expressed for him, and many kindly inquiries made during her illness.

Every one said Paul Schalk had met a well-deserved death. No one pitied or mourned for him; he did not leave a single friend behind.

Aaron and Hardman were glad to get rid of him so easily.

"I can't say I'm sorry," said Aaron, when he heard of Schalk's death.

"No more can I," said Hardman; "he was becoming dangerous. I had no idea he was such a wretch. Fancy attacking Mrs. Halstead in that brutal fashion! He deserved to come to a bad end."

To some one else Paul Schalk's death came as a relief. This was David Ribot, who had been in

hiding, not far from London, for some time. No sooner did he see the news in the paper than he went down to Silverdale. Grant was much surprised to see him, but he was not allowed to talk to Denise. He made no explanation at the time as to where he had been, nor did Grant ask him; he was too overwhelmed to take much interest in him.

David Ribot quickly took over the management of his business, which had been successfully carried on by Ralph Upson. So satisfactory had been Upson's work that David Ribot took him into partnership and settled down again to his ordinary life. In answer to numerous inquiries he said he had been to Cape Town on important business. Meeting Ben Aaron, and giving him this explanation, Ben said—

"Have you been diamond buying? I am interested in precious stones; I often make purchases."

"So I have heard," said David, unconcernedly. "I hear you trade with Herman Jacques, of Antwerp; he is a clever man, I know him."

"There can't have been anything wrong about those diamonds," thought Aaron, "or he would not have taken it so coolly."

When Denise was well enough to see him, David again came to Silverdale, and explained everything to her and Grant.

"I hope it will be a lesson to you," she said, "and that you will never do such things again."

"I can safely promise that," he said. "I mean to lead a respectable life, and to deal honestly in all my transactions."

"That's right," said Grant. "I am glad to hear it; you will be much happier."

Captain Dyson was a frequent visitor at Silverdale, and he and Agnes were often together.

"It's coming, Grant," said Denise. "I have seen it for some time."

"You mean?" he said, laughing, and nodding towards Cecil Dyson and Agnes.

"Yes; it will be a happy match, I am sure."

"He's a capital fellow," said Grant.

"He is, and will make Agnes a good husband."

Grant's trouble had pulled him down a lot; his nerves were not so steady; and when Morgan Cullen proposed that Captain Dyson should ride for them during the jumping season, he agreed, much to Cecil's delight.

"It's jolly good of you," he said to Grant, "to give me the chance of such good mounts."

"The obligation is on my side," said Grant. "I am very fortunate in securing the services of such an admirable rider."

"We have been friends for many years," said Cecil.

"We have," replied Grant, smiling, guessing what was coming.

"Would you object to me as a brother-in-law?" he asked.

"I shall be delighted to welcome you into our family circle. Have you asked Agnes?"

"Not yet. I wanted your permission; I have her mother's."

"And you have mine, and hearty wishes for your success," said Grant.

Captain Dyson was not long in putting the all-important question to Agnes, and he received the answer he desired, so they were engaged.

"I am so glad, Agnes," said Denise. "I am sure you will be happy."

Agnes was happy, and looked forward to a bright future with the man of her choice.

The winter campaign proved successful. Captain Dyson won the big steeplechases at Manchester and Kempton on Kismet, and also rode several winners of hurdle races in Grant's colours.

"You have done a good deal better than I expected," said Grant. "I hardly thought my lot were good enough."

"They are a useful team," said Cecil, "but I don't think old Kismet will stand another season."

"I'll pension him off," said Grant. "He deserves it; he has gone through a lot, done a heap of hard work; he's been a wonderful horse."

"And is now," said Cecil. "He'll carry you in the hunting field for many a season, if you wish. He may not stand severe training, but he's good to follow the hounds."

The wedding took place in May, and Captain Dyson and his wife spent the honeymoon in a beautiful country house in Surrey, lent them by a friend of Cecil's.

At Silverdale Grant's mother resided with them, but she did not intend to take up her permanent quarters there.

"You are much better alone," she said. "I love travelling about, and I have no one but myself to please now. I will come and stay with you for a month or two each year if you will have me, and visit Agnes for a similar period if she has no objections."

Denise said she must come when she wished, choosing her own time, and Agnes said the same.

The following year Grant was the proud father of a fine boy. Hal regarded the little bundle of clothes with curious eyes. He had no objection to a brother, but considered he was wrapped up too much.

"He'll be smothered, nurse," he said. "Why don't you put him on the floor and let him kick about?"

She explained that he was too young to be allowed to exercise in this way at present. But Hal did not see it in the same light. He said—

"He can't begin too early;

it will come all the easier to him."

Denise was delighted in this new happiness; the child banished painful recollections. She never gave a thought to that terrible time now; it all seemed many years ago, like a dim memory of the far-off past.

Grant's time was taken up with his horses principally. He had been appointed to the command of the County Yeomanry, and at the annual training Kismet resumed his duties as a charger.

The younger members of the troop were never tired of hearing stories of the Zulu War, and regarded Grant's horse with feelings akin to veneration. Kismet was the pet of the troop, and he was certainly the pick of the mounts. He took to his work again like an old hand, although there were times when he showed more of the 'chaser than the charger.

At Silverdale Kismet was a favourite with all the guests, and young Hal generally acted as guide when his box was visited.

"A gentleman wishes to see you," said James to Grant one morning. "His card, sir."

Grant looked at it.

"Dr. Sam Binder," he said, wondering who he could be.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "Of course, how stupid I am. Where is he?"

"In the morning room."

Grant opened the door, went in, and clasped Dr. Binder by the hand.

"I am pleased to see you," he said. "When did you arrive from Cape Town?"

"Last Saturday," said Dr. Binder. "You have got a fine place here. How's Mrs. Halstead?"

"Splendid; never was better."

"Quite got over that awful time?" asked the Doctor.

"You heard about it?"

"Saw it all in the papers."

"We never mention it," said Grant.

"That's right—the best way to forget it," said the Doctor.

Denise gave him a hearty welcome.

"I owe my happiness to you," she said.

"Do you? At one time I caused you some uneasiness, when Hal disappeared."

"But you made ample amends."

"I thought the voyage to England would do it," said Dr. Binder, smiling. "I may as well say I never expected you to return."

"You thought I would prevent that?" said Grant, laughing.

"I did; I am glad I was right," he said.

Hal came into the room, stopping short when he saw the stranger.

"Do you know this gentleman?" asked his mother.

Hal looked at him for a few moments, then said—

"Yes, I was in your buggy when those men took me away."

"Quite right, my little man," said Dr. Binder. "I hope you have forgiven me for leaving you alone."

"I am sure he has," said Denise.

Dr. Binder remained at Silverdale for some time; he was a welcome guest.

"Do you know what brought me to England?" he asked Grant.

"Came for a change, I suppose."

"Partly that; but the principal reason was, I wished to see how your marriage turned out. I had, I flatter myself, a hand in it."

"You had," said Grant, smiling. "Are you satisfied?"

"I am," said Dr. Binder.

THE END

NOTE:—For a Full List of the Novels of Nat Gould, see facing the title page of this book.

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